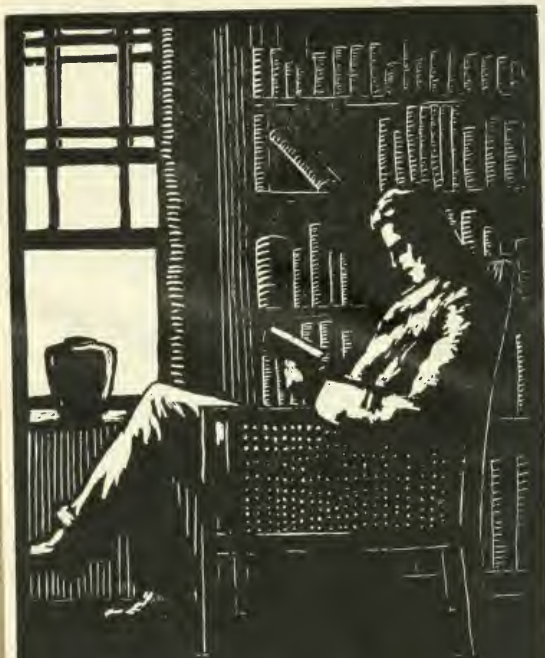


COWPER &
WORDSWORTH
& THEIR
POETRY

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COWPER & HIS POETRY

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William Cowper

COWPER & HIS POETRY

BY

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MORE than thirty years after Cowper's death, Macaulay, turning aside for the moment from graver work, drew a thumb-nail sketch of the "gentle, shy, melancholy Calvinist, whose spirit had been broken by fagging at school . . . and whose favourite associates were a blind old lady and an evangelical divine." The portrait is apt, but not wholly just ; it contains the germ of truth, but is not wholly truthful ; it is apposite but inadequate ; it conveys an unfair impression of weakness and insignificance ; it belittles the poet's capacity. The recluse of Olney was destined to play an important rôle in his century—to share in the quickening of its religious life, to aid in no uncertain manner in the regeneration of its poetry. He was to witness the overthrow of an apparently unassailable school and the establishing of a new order of things. In the hands of Pope, with his fundamental premise that the proper study of mankind was man, poetry degenerated into a mere intellectual exercise, brilliant literary satire, epigrammatic exposition of the neo-classic creed. This school had closed its doors on nature. James Thomson (who owed more to Allan Ramsay than he ever acknowledged), who threw open the wickets of the trim little gardens of the south, claimed :

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I solitary court

Th' inspiring breeze, and meditate the book
Of Nature ever open, aiming thence

Warm from the heart to pour the mortal song ;

and as the coldness of intellectualism vanishes a new note of human sympathy steals into poetry. Crabbe, in revolt against the idealism of Goldsmith, depicts scenes of sordid misery with minute pencil ; in Cowper the bitter cry of the slave rises heavenward. The devotional spirit, crushed in an age of reason and free inquiry, revives. Experimental religion is restored to its place ; poetry becomes once more passionate and personal. The flame of religion, fanned by the zeal of the Revival, bursts again into full passion and vigour in the pathos and the personal note of the Olney Hymns and "The Task."

Born in an age whose vices are generally held to outweigh its virtues, and whose defects appear the more glaring in the light of nineteenth-century idealism, Cowper, turn whither he might, could find little ground for satisfaction in its survey. Religion and morals had reached a very low ebb ; irreligion and indifference had permeated all classes of society ; rare gleams of spiritual light illuminated the arid wastes of reason and common sense. The Church stood degraded in the eyes of a people which had largely cast off all forms of religious belief ; it groaned under a burden of abuse that crippled and annulled its spiritual activity ; it was cursed by the absence of its incumbents

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and the utter neglect of their cures. The upper clergy—redeemed from absolute contempt by a Butler or a Bentley—were largely agnostic, preferment-hunters, theological controversialists ; the lower ignorant, drunken, and poverty-stricken. An immense and impassable gulf separated the episcopal palace from the thatched cottage of the parish priest, the prelate in magnificent equipage from the curate slouching along in tattered cassock from his garret lodging, willing to preach for a shilling and a dinner or to read prayers for twopence and a cup of coffee. The magnificent moral force of Puritanism was expended. It was succeeded by the “cold, passionless and prudential theology of the eighteenth century.” Christianity was reduced to a mere moral system ; outwardly, religion had shrivelled and died.

The prints of Hogarth mirror the licence of the age ; its shameless Beer streets and Gin lanes ; the riotousness of its elections ; its bribing agents ; its drunken divines ; its brutal cockpits ; its fetid prisons ; its barbarous mad-houses ; its abominable whipping-posts ; its degrading pillories. The playhouse was sadly degenerate. The Comic Muse, grown old and dull and unattractive and lonely, had ceased to appeal to her public. Her voice was cracked and broken ; her ribald jests grown stale ; her songs tasteless, her joints stiff, her finery faded. Nor was her sister Tragedy in better plight. Her voice, too, had died away to a whisper and her skill was sadly feeble. Imitations of

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the "Tatler" and "Spectator" papers provided ample scope for the creative energies of writers. Richardson, who regarded himself as a moral reformer, and taught, as Johnson said, "the passions to move at the command of virtue," had not yet appeared to set the ladies weeping with his sentimentalism; or Fielding, "conversant with every kind of character, from the minister at his levee to the bailiff in his sponging-house, from the duchess at her drum to the landlady behind her bar." When Cowper was a boy at Westminster, crowds made holiday visiting Bedlam; whither he too found his way, "not altogether insensible of the misery of the poor captives nor destitute of feeling for them." The Universities were deeply imbued with the prevailing spirit of materialism. Chesterfield in "A Modern Conversation" sketches his academic friend, who, having resided long in college, had contracted "the laziness, the soaking, the pride, and the pedantry of the cloister." With Oxford Adam Smith was unfavourably impressed, and Jeffrey, later, bitterly lamented the hours wasted in the southern University. The social barriers were sharply drawn and unsurmountable. When her Grace of Buckingham was invited by Lady Huntingdon to hear honest Whitefield, she declared the doctrines to be repulsive and disrespectful—that it was "monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth"; that such teaching was highly offensive and insulting, and "utterly at variance

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with high rank and good breeding." Yet her ladyship's favourite numbered in his audience, at one time or another, such men of intellect and fashion as the Earl of Chatham; Bubb Doddington, at whose seat at Eastbury Young met Voltaire; Charles Townshend; Horace Walpole; the Earl of Chesterfield; Frederick, Prince of Wales; her Grace of Cumberland, and a hundred others, among the best and the worst in the land. By this time a mighty religious revival was in progress; fashionable irreligion and popular vices were being assailed by the fiery eloquence of the evangelical preacher, and the firm citadels of respectable ecclesiasticism shaken to their very foundations.

"Few books," Southey declared, "have made more religious enthusiasts than the 'Serious Call' of quietist William Law." Therefrom, acknowledged John Wesley, sprang the seed of Methodism. Wesley organized his societies, instructed his itinerants, laboured untiringly among the masses. Whitefield, insolent in censure, magnificent in presence, held his hearers thrall'd by the power of his dramatic eloquence, his voice bearing like the blast of doom on men's consciences. "The new sect pretending to the very strictest piety" encountered bitter opposition; but Hogarth employed his pen in vain caricature, her Grace of Buckingham penned unavailing words of bitterness. There was leavening of the masses, and the Methodists, after bitter revilement and scorn—will they, nill they?—must out from the

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bosom of the Church into the cloud-laden uncertainty of Dissent. The Calvinist Evangelicals, earnest ministers living out their lives in dull parishes, plain Churchmen—Hervey, by whose “Meditations” Johnson set little store; peaceful Venn, who gave the “Complete Duty of Man” to the world; austere Romaine; sturdy John Newton; earnest Thomas Scott, wrestling with Burnet and Hooker on “Justification”—fearlessly announced the coming of God to the soul. The spark of religion leapt into flame, dazzling, blinding, illuminating the darkness of the land. Life gathered afresh within the bosom of the Church; the public conscience was awakened, men’s hearts were opened. They set themselves to cleanse the abominable dens dignified by the name of prisons; they faced the problem of the education of the illiterate masses; civic interests claimed attention; Wilberforce raised unceasing appeal on behalf of the slaves; while Sheridan and Burke dazzled with their eloquence in the cause of Nuncomar.

II

BORN on November 26, 1731, at the Rectory, Berkhamstead, William Cowper came of excellent stock on both sides of the family. His father, with good Jacobite blood in his veins, who, be it marked, wrote verses himself—eccentric John Cowper, D.D., chaplain to George II—was son to Spencer Cowper, judge of the Common Pleas, and a great-

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uncle was Whig Chancellor to Anne and George I. His mother, Anne Donne, who traced back her descent to Henry III, numbered the poet among her ancestors. Years later,¹ when fast descending into the vale, Cowper wrote to his cousin, Mrs. Bodham, wife of the rector of Mattishall, in acknowledgment of the miniature in oils of his mother by Heims : " There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper ; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. . . . Add to this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points."

When he was six years of age his mother died, but the impression made by her personality remained ineffaceable during life. " The world," he continues in the letter from which we have just quoted, " could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me as the picture you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits, somewhat akin to what I should have felt had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. . . . I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression." In this spirit he penned the saddest and tenderest lines

¹ February 27, 1790.

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in the language. The recollection of a thousand and one tendernesses moved him to write his exquisite heart-broken verses, where we share with him as in a common sorrow.

Oh that those lips had language ! Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smile I see
The same that oft in childhood solaced me :
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,
“ Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears
away ! ” . . .

My mother ! when I learnt that thou wast dead,
Say, wast thou conscious of the tears I shed ?
Hovered thy spirit o'er thy sorrowing son,
Wretch even then, life's journey just begun ?
Perhaps thou gavest me, though unfelt, a kiss :
Perhaps a tear, if souls can weep in bliss—
Ah, that maternal smile ! It answers—Yes.
I heard the bell tolled on thy burial day,
I saw the hearse that bore thee slow away,
And, turning from my nursery window, drew
A long, long sigh, and wept a last adieu !
But was it such ?—It was. Where thou art gone
Adieus and farewells are a sound unknown.
May I but meet thee on that peaceful shore,
The parting word shall pass my lips no more !
Thy maidens, grieved themselves at my concern,
Oft gave me promise of thy quick return.
What ardently I wished I long believed,
And, disappointed still, was still deceived.
By expectation every day beguiled,
Dupe of *to-morrow* even from a child.
Thus many a sad to-morrow came and went,
Till, all my stock of infant sorrow spent,
I learnt at last submission to my lot ;

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But, though I less deplored thee, ne'er forgot.

Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more,
Children not thine have trod my nursery floor ;
And where the gardener Robin, day by day,
Drew me to school along the public way,
Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapped
In scarlet mantle warm, and velvet-capped,
'Tis now become a history little known,
That once we called the pastoral house our own.
Short-lived possession ! but the record fair
That memory keeps, of all thy kindness there,
Still outlives many a storm that has effaced
A thousand other themes less deeply traced.
Thy nightly visits to my chamber made
That thou mightst know me safe and warmly laid ;
Thy morning bounties ere I left my home,
The biscuit, or confectionery plum ;
The fragrant waters on my cheeks bestowed
By thy own hand, till fresh they shone and glowed :
All this, and more endearing still than all,
Thy constant flow of love, that knew no fall,
Ne'er roughened by those cataracts and brakes,
That humour interposed too often makes ;
All this still legible in memory's page,
And still to be so to my latest age,
Adds joy to duty, makes me glad to pay
Such honours to thee as my numbers may ;
Perhaps a frail memorial, but sincere,
Not scorned in heaven, though little noticed here.

Gravely austere in comparison are those lines
of Wordsworth in the "Prelude" :

Such was she—not from faculties more strong
Than others have, but from the times, perhaps,
And spot in which she lived, and through a grace

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Of modest meekness, simple-mindedness,
A heart that found benignity and hope
Being itself benign.

From the darkened home William was sent to Dr. Pitman's boarding-school, seven miles away, where he had the misfortune to experience more than ordinary hardship. Pilloried for all time in this pathetic passage in the "Memoir" stands the abominable bully who made life intolerable for him. "My chief affliction consisted in my being singled out from all the other boys by a lad of about fifteen years of age as a proper object upon whom he might let loose the cruelty of his temper. I choose to conceal the particular recital of the many acts of barbarity with which he made it his business continually to persecute me. It will be sufficient to say that his savage treatment of me impressed such a dread of his figure upon my mind that I well remember being afraid to lift my eyes upon him higher than to his knees, and that I knew him better by his shoe-buckles than by any other part of his dress." From Market Street he was removed in consequence of an affection of the eyes, and boarded at the house of a Mr. Disney, an oculist. After treatment there, he was sent at the age of ten to Westminster School, then under the headship of Dr. Nicholls, where he excelled at cricket and other games and stood in high favour with the master. Life at Westminster was happy enough; he broke bounds occasionally like

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other boys, played trap-and-span-farthing, kept mice, and, as he later lamented, "acquired Latin and Greek at the expense of a knowledge much more important." His Latin tutor was greasy-locked Vincent Bourne, on whom the Duke of Richmond played a scandalous joke, and who, he afterwards declared, was a better Latin poet than Tibullus, Propertius, and Ausonius. "He was so good-natured," the poet wrote, "and so indolent that I lost more than I got by him, for he made me as idle as himself. He was such a sloven, as if he had trusted to his genius as a cloak for everything that could disgust you in his person; and indeed in his writings he has almost made amends for all." Among his fellow-scholars Cowper numbered Warren Hastings (against whom he refused to believe a syllable of evil, when England was set by the ears over the question), Impey, Churchill, admirable Joseph Hill, Lord Dartmouth, Colman, William and Charles Bagot, Dick Sutton, Robert Lloyd (son of Tappy), Bonnell Thornton, Sir William Russell (whom the poet so greatly mourned), young Lord Higham-Ferrers (who played off a ludicrous trick on excellent Nicholls, and who fought against the rebels in the '45, when the school was put on its honour to give no offence to the young Jacobites). He wrote English verses after the manner of poets great and small, and Latin elegiacs—

At Westminster, where little poets strive
To set a distich upon six and five,
I was a poet too

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—and was in all probability present at the performance of the “*Ignoramus*,” produced in 1748, when Marmaduke Lewis so distinguished himself.¹ While still at Westminster he made his first acquaintance with his cousin Harriet (afterwards Lady Hesketh), daughter of Ashley Cowper. At Westminster, too, he experienced his first morbid attack. When crossing St. Margaret’s Churchyard one evening a skull thrown up by a gravedigger, working by the light of his lanthorn, struck him on the leg. This incident induced a train of melancholy reflections and succeeding lowness of spirits, but the impression speedily passed. He read through the “*Iliad*” and the “*Odyssey*,” and presently his school-days ran to a close.

When nearly nineteen Cowper was apprenticed to Mr. Chapman, of Ely Place. Thereafter followed the famous three years misspent in an attorney’s office, “giggling and making giggle,” when we find him making sheep’s eyes at a certain young lady—a cousin of his—a Miss Theodora Cowper, daughter of droll little Ashley who lived in Southampton Row. Thither he conducted his fellow-clerk—a hard-working, determined fellow, later Chancellor Thurlow—but in place of grinding away at the law himself he reeled off verses to “*Delia*,” clever enough some of them, which must have highly gratified the young lady in question, but in nowise advanced his prospects in his profession. The law, however, he neglected utterly.

¹ Publications of Cowper Society paper by John Sargeant M.A.

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Among other things he did an excellent sketch,
"Of Himself" :

William was once a bashful youth ;
His modesty was such,
That one might say (to say the truth)
He rather had too much.

Howe'er, it happened by degrees,
He mended and grew perter ;
In company was more at ease,
And dressed a little smarter ;

Nay, now and then would look quite gay,
As other people do ;
And sometimes said, or tried to say,
A witty thing or two.

At length, improved from head to heel,
'Twere scarce too much to say,
No dancing bear was so genteel,
Or half so 'dégagé.'

Now that a miracle so strange
May not in vain be shown,
Let the dear maid who wrought the change
E'er claim him for her own.

At twenty-one he was settled in chambers
in the Middle Temple, giving on Pump Court,¹

In a paper by Frederick Rogers, read before the Cowper Society, entitled "Cowper in the Temple," the following description of its precincts occurs: "It was a squalid, slummy Temple on its Alsatian side, with a sprinkling of the disreputable among its inhabitants, and sordid and hideous crimes happened within its borders in that century, though none of note are reported during Cowper's time. Temple Bar still remained a ghastly Golgotha till nearly the end of the century; the last head is said to have fallen into Fleet Street amid screams of disgust from the populace in

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where, a year earlier, Edmund Burke was entered as a student. At 1 Inner Temple Lane Dr. Johnson edited Shakespeare, and close by lived Richardson the novelist.¹ On June 24, 1754, Cowper was called to the Bar. He dined every evening with the Nonsense Club—not wholly nonsensical—all old Westminsters, and some of whom were, alas ! already too much given to the bottle—dabbling Bonnell Thornton ; George Colman, who translated Terence, and who figured later in our poet's life ; poor, drudging, struggling Lloyd, who was only too familiar with the interior of a debtor's prison ; solid, sensible Joseph Hill, friend true as steel ; Bensley, whose tragedy was very great ; and perhaps William de Grey, who ended his days in the peerage. Edward Thurlow, Charles Churchill, and John Wilkes were occasionally of the circle. Cowper contributed at least five papers to the "Connoisseur," a weekly journal started by Colman. Vastly unlike the sad Olney recluse of later life is this Temple dilettante. Thus he describes the milksop Suckling :² "The delicate Billy Suckling is the contempt of the men, the jest of the women, and the darling of his mamma. She doats on him to distraction, and is in perpetual admiration of

1785. Close by the old Bar stood the famous Devil Tavern, until it made way for Child's Bank in 1788. Its literary reputation began in Ben Jonson's day, and it was a resort of literary men, barristers, and members of the theatrical profession far on into the eighteenth century. But the 'Devil' became disreputable and got on to the down grade before Cowper's time, and if he knew it at all he probably regarded it as a place to be avoided."

¹ "Cowper in London," p. 24.

² "The Delicate Billy Suckling," "Connoisseur," No. 111.

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his wit and anxiety for his health. The good young gentleman for his part is neither undutiful nor ungrateful : she is the only woman he does not look on with indifference, and she is his tutoress, his physician, and his nurse. She provides his broth every evening, will not suffer him to look into a book by candlelight lest he should hurt his eyes : and takes care to have his bed warmed—nay, I have known him sit with his mamma's white handkerchief round his neck through a whole evening to guard him from the wind of that *ugly door*, or that *terrible chink* in the wainscot."

On July 9, 1756, Dr. Cowper passed away, and thenceforth the Rectory was no longer home for the son. He realized for the first time that he and "his native place were disconnected for ever," and was stricken mute. Nor was the poignancy of his grief ever softened.

In 1759 the poet removed to the Inner Temple, where he bought chambers for £250, and as his aversion for the law increased his prospects steadily blackened. Time slipped past, friends scattered, his loneliness depressed him, and although he wore a brave front the financial question grew urgent. He became a prey to melancholy, grew morbid and neurotic, gave himself over to endless introspection, and ailed physically. On August 9, 1763, he wrote gloomily to Lady Hesketh : "I am of a very singular temperament, and very unlike all the men I have ever conversed with. Certainly I am not an absolute fool ; but I have more weaknesses

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than the greatest of all the fools I can recollect at present. In short, if I am as fit for the next world as I am unfit for this—and God forbid I should speak it in vanity!—I would not change conditions with any saint in Christendom.” Presently occurred the decisive crisis in his life.

Patronage of the offices of Clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords and of Reading Clerk and Clerk of Committees—now fallen vacant—rested in the hands of a relative, Major Cowper. The last two were offered to our poet and eagerly accepted. But his timid nature shrank from the publicity attaching to these offices. He sought an interchange, and was nominated unwillingly to the Clerkship. Scarce was this done, however, when a party antagonistic to the Cowper interests demanded that the Major’s nominee should submit to public examination at the Bar of the House. The anticipated ordeal preyed on a hypersensitive mind; the poet’s spirits sank, hallucinations assailed him, despair overwhelmed him. He anticipated madness; and the recollection of an incident which had happened to him when a mere child precipitated the crisis. His father, Dr. Cowper, had put into his hands a treatise in favour of self-murder, and had listened in silence to his reasonings against it. This he now interpreted as implying agreement with the author, and the casual declaration of a chop-house acquaintance in favour of the right to self-murder determined him to that course. He purchased half an ounce of laudanum, and, reading a letter

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in a paper which seemed to bear on his own case, hurried out to effect his purpose in solitude. Scarce had he gone a mile when he conceived the idea of flight to France, a change of religion, and a monastic life ; but in the act of packing he remembered the laudanum and abandoned his fantastic notion. Hindered from taking the fatal step by the dread of interruption in his chambers, he next resolved on drowning ; but, chance intervening in the shape of a porter seated on some goods, he returned in his coach to his chambers, where again he decided to have recourse to laudanum. Seized, however, with sudden revulsion, he hurled the accursed stuff out of the window, and lay for some hours with a penknife directly pointed against his heart, reproaching himself bitterly with his "folly and rank cowardice."¹ An attempt to hang himself on the morning of the ordeal proved all but successful, and had not his garter broken there would have been no further story. His laundress entered his room at the noise of his fall, under the impression that he was seized with a fit, whereupon "I sent to a friend, to whom I related the whole affair, and dispatched him to my kinsman at the coffee-house. As soon as the latter arrived I pointed to the broken garter, which lay in the middle of the room, and apprised him also of the attempt I had been making. His words were : 'My dear Mr. Cowper, you terrify me ! To be sure, you cannot hold the office at this rate. Where is

¹ V. Memoir.

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the deputation ? ' I gave him the key of the drawer where it was deposited, and his business requiring his immediate attendance, he took it away with him, and there ended all my connection with the Parliament office.'"

Now fell the horror of infinite despair. Convinced that he had committed the unpardonable sin, and that the avenging wrath of a righteous God would consume him, he found rest neither by night nor by day. Conviction of doom was unshakable, anguish of soul his continual portion. He dragged out solitary days of gloom, passionate, hopeless hours, and wrote these Sapphics of the lost :

Hatred and vengeance,—my eternal portion,
Scarce can endure delay of execution,—
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
Soul in a moment.

Damned below Judas ! more abhorred than he was,
Who for a few pence sold his holy Master !
Twice betrayed Jesus me, the last delinquent,
Deems the profanest.

Man disavows, and Deity disowns me,
Hell might afford my miseries a shelter ;
Therefore, Hell keeps her ever hungry mouths all
Bolted against me.

Hard lot ! encompassed with a thousand dangers ;
Weary, faint, trembling with a thousand terrors,
I'm called, if vanquished ! to receive a sentence
Worse than Abiram's.

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Him the vindictive rod of angry Justice
Sent quick and howling to the centre headlong ;
I, fed with judgment in a fleshly tomb, am
Buried above ground.

Argument was unavailing. His brother John ¹ arrived from Cambridge, and sought to comfort him. Martin Madan, whose head was "once endued with a legal periwig," then a popular Evangelical preacher, brought a momentary ray of hope to the sufferer's soul ; but he could not dispel the darkness. Madness descended ; the poor derelict was whirled away mercifully to Dr. Cotton's, and for a period all was dark.

Gradually rare gleams of hope alternated with the cloud-drifts of despair. The mild doctor, himself a verse-writer, noticed an improvement, and talked cheerfully with his patient ; he discussed the deep things of the soul, and soon the good seed bore fruit. Reading one day a verse of Scripture, in a moment he "believed and received the Gospel." The mists of doubt and despair rolled away ; he walked in ecstasy and wrote glad verses, and sang the song of deliverance :

The soul, a dreary province once
Of Satan's dark domain,
Feels a new empire formed within,
And owns a heavenly reign.

Hervey's "Meditations," which Lady Hesketh had sent him, gave him infinite pleasure, and

¹ The Rev. John Cowper, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, since 1763.

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he considered this author "one of the most scriptural writers in the world."

But the Doctor was not deceived by this momentary improvement. Cowper remained under his charge for a twelvemonth longer. On June 7, 1765, deep in his debt, he shook hands with the little physician and set out with his servant, Sam Roberts, whose 'fellow' he never saw, and his *protégé*—Dick Coleman—on a visit to his brother at Cambridge. Presently he was settled in rooms in Huntingdon.

Cowper was now in his thirty-fifth year. All hope of success in his profession had vanished ; his friends, with the exception of Joseph Hill, had forgotten him. To Hill, faithful now in his hour of darkness, amid the shattering of his fortunes, he later dedicated an "Epistle," so repaying his debt in part :

Dear Joseph,—Five and twenty years ago—
Alas ! how time escapes—'tis even so—
With frequent intercourse, and always sweet,
And always friendly we were wont to cheat
A tedious hour, and now we never meet !
As some grave gentleman in Terence says
('Twas therefore much the same in ancient
days),

Good lack, we know not what to-morrow brings—
Strange fluctuation of all human things !
True. Changes will befall, and friends may part,
But distance only cannot change the heart :
And were I called to prove the assertion true,
One proof should serve—a reference to you.

Whence comes it then, that in the wane of life,
Though nothing have occurred to kindle strife,

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We find the friends we fancied we had won,
Though numerous once, reduced to few or none ?
Can gold grow worthless, that has stood the touch ?
No ; gold they seemed, but they were never
such.

Once on a time, an emperor, a wise man,
No matter where, in China or Japan,
Decreed, that whosoever should offend
Against the well-known duties of a friend,
Convicted once, should ever after wear
But half a coat, and show his bosom bare ;
The punishment importing this, no doubt,
That all was naught within, and all found out.
O happy Britain ! we have not to fear
Such hard and arbitrary measures here ;
Else, could a law like that which I relate
Once have the sanction of our triple state,
Some few that I have known in days of old,
Would run most dreadful risk of catching cold ;
While you, my friend, whatever wind should
blow,
Might traverse England safely to and fro,
An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,
Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within.

His relatives, who for the sake of the family name had clubbed together and settled an allowance on him, eyed him askance. He was tainted with madness, burdened by the expense of Sam Roberts and the outcast Dick Coleman, and harassed on account of this extravagance by the remonstrances of those who contributed his means of livelihood. While in this unhappy situation an anonymous letter (perhaps from

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Theodora) arrived, approving his conduct and bearing the assurance that if any contribution was withdrawn the deficiency would be made good. He resigned a Commissionership of Bankruptcy, and thereby reduced his already small income by some £60 per annum. He had given evidence of aptitude for nothing, except the facile writing of light verse. Failure seemed his assured portion. But for the moment he was happy ; his spiritual burden had rolled away.

By way of amusement, the town possessed "a card assembly and a dance assembly, a horse-race and a club and a bowling-green." Presently he was on terms with the Unwins, "the most comfortable social folks you ever knew." The father, the Rev. Morley Unwin, the non-resident rector of Grimston, he likened to Parson Adams. Struck by the stranger's appearance, young Unwin had addressed him one morning after prayers, and thus one of the immortal friendships of literature was begun. Henceforth his lot was cast with the Evangelicals.

From the very commencement of the intimacy Cowper had felt attracted by Mrs. Unwin, prim enough Puritan, to judge from Harvey's engraving of her. He never saw her without feeling "the better for her company"; and when, dreading the loneliness of winter, he found that one of Unwin's pupils had left the house, he removed thither after a "tumult of anxious solicitude" and took up his abode with

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his new friends. He commenced his "Memoir"; spent his days in devotional exercises with the family; and such was the tenor of their lives that they acquired the name of Methodists among the less spiritually minded. To his cousin, Mrs. Cowper,¹ he thus described their manner of existence: "We breakfast commonly between eight and nine; till eleven we read either the Scripture or the sermons of some faithful preacher of these holy mysteries; at eleven we attend divine service, which is performed here twice every day; and from twelve to three we separate and amuse ourselves as we please. During the interval I either read in my own apartment or walk or ride or work in the garden. We seldom sit an hour after dinner, but, if the weather permits, adjourn to the garden, where, with Mrs. Unwin and her son, I have generally the pleasure of religious conversation till tea-time. If it rains or is too windy for walking, we either converse indoors or sing some hymns of Martin's collection, and by the help of Mrs. Unwin's harpsichord make up a tolerable concert, in which our hearts, I hope, are the most musical performers. After tea we sally forth to walk in good earnest. Mrs. Unwin is a good walker, and we have generally travelled about four miles before we see home again. At night we read and converse as before till supper, and commonly finish the evening either with hymns or with a sermon.

¹ Mrs. Cowper (Frances Maria), wife of Colonel (late Major) Cowper, first cousin both to the poet and her husband.

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And last of all, the family are called to prayers. I need not tell you that such a life is consistent with the utmost cheerfulness ; accordingly we are all happy, and dwell together in unity as brethren. Mrs. Unwin has almost a maternal affection for me, and her son and I are brethren.”¹

Vague notions of taking Holy Orders passed through his head but were speedily abandoned. He turned his attention to gardening, and became a great florist and herb doctor. When certain inevitable Huntingdon gossip filtered through to his ears, young Unwin, returning from London, was requested to call at the Park, the residence of evangelical Mrs. Cowper, the Colonel's wife, with an introduction. Upon his return Cowper dispatched the following letter to his kinswoman : “ My dear cousin, you sent my friend Unwin home to us charmed with your kind reception of him and with everything he saw at the Park. Shall I once more give you a peep into my vile and deceitful heart ? What motive do you think lay at the bottom of my conduct when I desired him to call upon you ? I did not suspect, at first, that pride and vain-glory had any share in it ; but quickly after I had recommended the visit to him I discovered in that fruitful soil the very root of the matter. You know that I am a stranger here ; all such are suspected characters unless they bring their credentials with them. To this moment, I believe, it is a matter of speculation in the place

¹ October 20, 1766.

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whence I came and to whom I belong. Though my friend, you may suppose, before I was admitted an inmate here, was satisfied that I was not a mere vagabond, and has since that time received more convincing proofs of my *sponsibility*, yet I could not resist the opportunity of furnishing him with ocular demonstration of it by introducing him to one of my most splendid connexions; that when he hears me called *that fellow Cowper*, which has happened heretofore, he may be able, upon unquestionable evidence, to assert my gentlemanhood, and relieve me from the weight of that opprobrious appellation. Oh pride! pride! it deceives one with the subtlety of a serpent, and seems to walk erect, though it crawls upon this earth. How will it twist and twine itself about to get from under the Cross, which it is the glory of our Christian calling to be able to bear with patience and good will!" Poor lonely Cowper! A minor trouble this; yet you lay it seriously to heart!

On Sunday, July 2, 1767, as Unwin senior was riding to church at Graveley, he was thrown from his horse and sustained fracture of the skull. Death stalked rudely into the house, and by the following Thursday he had passed away. Once again Cowper must face the world, but on this occasion not alone. "I shall still, by God's leave, continue with Mrs. Unwin, whose behaviour to me has always been that of a mother to a son." To them in their sorrow came the ex-slaver John Newton, curate of

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Olney, "a little odd-looking man of the Methodistical order," who found them with plans unsettled. Their chief desire was for an evangelical minister to shepherd them in their need. A sentence in a letter from Newton led them to decide on Olney as their future home, and Orchard Side, close by the vicarage, was engaged. On December 9 they migrated to their new residence.

III

AT Orchard Side, whose prison-like appearance shocked William Unwin, Cowper wrote the "Moral Satires," "The Task," and "John Gilpin"; from its celebrated parlour he dated many of the most charming letters in the language; within its cracked, uncomely walls he knew misery and humiliation of soul, wading through waters of bitterness and treading the wine-press alone. Standing in the low quarter of the town, the situation of the house was far from agreeable. It was exposed to the harassments of the boys, who splashed the windows with mud; pierced by the wailing of infants, the squabbling of children, the scolding of women, the brawling of the lace-makers, the disgusting language of the men, the barking of dogs, and the multitudinous sounds and odours of the market-place. It was damp; the cellars in winter were filled with water; opportunity for exercise was limited. Yet, despite these unpleasant associa-

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tions, when the poet quitted the house for Weston, he wrote to Newton : " I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts ; and, though I cannot easily account for it, having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me." ¹ Cowper, in his own eyes,

weorcum fâh
synnum âsâeled, sorgum gewaeled,
bitrum gebunden, bisgum bethrunen. . . .²

the singer of hope and trust, standing on the threshold of measureless despair ; the poet who again " poured the stream of divine truth into the channels of our literature, after they had been shut against it for more than a hundred years," ³ in timid quest of sheltering haven, was, for the moment, content.

From this time forward John Newton played his part in the poet's life. Born on July 24, 1725, O. S.⁴ Newton had experienced in youth a series of almost incredible vicissitudes. His father, who was for many years shipmaster in the

¹ November 17, 1786.

With evil stained
In sin fast shackled, sorrow weighed
Bound with bitterness, with trouble compassèd.

" Elene," ll. 1243-1245.

³ Miller, " First Impressions of England."

⁴ V. Memoir.

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Mediterranean trade, took the lad aboard his vessel on his tenth birthday. Later, he was impressed aboard his Majesty's ship the *Harwich* and was promoted to the rank of midshipman. He deserted, was captured, flogged, and degraded. Obtaining his discharge off the African coast, he entered the service of a slave dealer of Sierra Leone ; and despite the fact that he became the object of intense hate and cruelty on the part of his master's negro mistress, he yet found it possible to engage in mathematical studies. Presently, while on his way back to England, as he carelessly glanced through the pages of Stanhope's "Thomas-à-Kempis," the thought occurred, "What if these things should be true?" A violent tempest broke, he put prayer to the test ; the storm abated, and soon land was sighted. Newton stepped ashore a converted man. Encouraged by Dr. Young, author of "Night Thoughts," to enter the ministry, he was after a time ordained by Dr. Green, Bishop of Lincoln.

Settled in Olney as curate, Newton was consumed with religious zeal. The vicar, Evangelical Moses Browne, with a taste for religious versifying, who "too much resembled Eli in his indulgence of his children," harassed by involved money affairs and the care of a numerous family, resided at Blackheath. Thus the curate was allowed perfect liberty to assault the strongholds of atheism and agnosticism after the manner he chose. His efforts to win souls were indefatigable. He preached in the surrounding district and invited his brethren

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to share in his work ; he held children's meetings and filled his modest church to overflowing. Gradually Cowper, from whom he was " seldom separate when at home," was dragged into the circle of his activities. These late lines, comfortably written in the snug parlour, describe the interior of many a miserable Olney cottage, as seen by the poet's charitable eyes during his visits with Newton :

Poor, yet industrious, modest, quiet, neat,
Such claim compassion in a night like this,
And have a friend in every feeling heart.
Warmed, while it lasts, by labour, all day long
They brave the season, and yet find at eve,
Ill clad and fed but sparsely, time to cool.
The frugal housewife trembles when she lights
Her scanty stock of brushwood, blazing clear,
But dying soon, like all terrestrial joys.
The few small embers left she nurses well,
And while her infant race, with outspread hands,
And crowded knees, sit cowering o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warmed.
The man feels least, as more inured than she
To winter, and the current in his veins
More briskly moved by his severer toil ;
Yet he too finds his own distress in theirs.
The taper soon extinguished, which I saw
Dangled along at the cold finger's end
Just when the day declined, and the brown loaf
Lodged on the shelf, half eaten without sauce
Of savoury cheese, or butter costlier still,
Sleep seems their only refuge : for, alas !
Where penury is felt the thought is chained,
And sweet colloquial pleasures are but few.

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With all this thrift they thrive not. All the care,
Ingenious parsimony takes, but just
Saves the small inventory, bed and stool,
Skillet and old carved chest, from public sale.
They live, and live without extorted alms
From grudging hands, but other boast have none
To soothe their honest pride, that scorns to beg ;
Nor comfort else, but in their mutual love.

Cowper attended Newton's meetings at the "Great House," a mansion belonging to Lord Dartmouth, patron of the Olney living, and was called upon to lead in prayer, an ordeal insupportable to his sensitive nature. These proceedings fell under the censure of Lady Hesketh. "Mr. Newton is an excellent man, I make no doubt, and a strong-minded man like himself might have been of great use, but to such a mind—such a tender mind—and to such a wounded yet lively imagination as our cousin's, I am persuaded that eternal praying and preaching were too much ; nor could it, I think, be otherwise." And ever since, it has been the habit to speak of Newton in a derogatory and unkindly strain. The discipline to which Cowper subjected himself was rigorous ; even with Lady Hesketh he ceased to correspond. But if Newton acquired complete ascendancy over Cowper's mind, he was, despite his reputation for preaching people mad, neither narrow nor tyrannical by nature ; neither morbid nor soured. He possessed a powerful force of will, great humour, and warm human sympathy. Cowper in the eyes of the world passed for a

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melancholy failure, a brooding idler, if not a simpleton, without money, prospects, or friends. Yet he was far from the weakly effeminate of popular conception. He could answer Newton with spirit, and he detested Canniford, the Weston curate, unreasoningly. He possessed dandified instincts, and when he had little over the dozen books of his own on his shelves, he could pay half a guinea for "a genteelish tooth-pick case" and twenty-five shillings for a stock-buckle that would "make a figure at Olney." That Newton is to be held responsible for Cowper's third derangement is absurd. Cowper went mad in the Middle Temple when he had health, money, interest, and lively and agreeable companionship. He went mad in the Inner Temple and attempted his life when nominated to the Clerkship of the Journals in the House of Lords. He went mad now, amid conditions which had once afforded him the highest pleasure and satisfaction. The death of his brother John, straitened circumstances, absence of intellectual intercourse, constant introspection, conduced to one inevitable issue. But for the moment the shadows were chased away through the congenial occupation of sacred composition.

During 1771-72, while Cowper was engaged along with Newton in the compilation of the Olney "Hymn Book," his mind alternated between hope and despair, assurance and uncertainty. He became engaged to Mrs. Unwin, but, convinced in a dream that sentence of damnation had been pronounced upon him and that God

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had withdrawn His presence, the obsession haunted his waking hours and became the central conviction of his life henceforth. The memory of his earlier disorder, described in these lines of terrible significance, revived :

Food I loathed, nor ever tasted
But by violence constrained,
Strength decay'd and body wasted
Spoke the terrors I sustained.

Bound and watch'd, lest life abhorring,
I should my own death procure,
For to me the Pit of Roaring
Seem'd more easy to endure.

Then, what soul-distressing noises
Seemed to reach me from below,
Visionary scenes and voices,
Flames of Hell and screams of woe ! ¹

On January 24, 1773, he plunged into a melancholy that made him almost an infant, and, taking refuge at the vicarage from the noise of the annual fair on April 12, he remained there for over a twelvemonth. All efforts at removal were fruitless. Recourse was had once again to Dr. Cotton, but the poet, racked with agony unspeakable, and convinced it was the will of God that he should, "after the example of Abraham, perform an expensive act of obedience and offer, not a son, but himself," attempted his life. Constant care was necessary. Mrs. Unwin removed to the vicarage,

¹ V. Wright, "Life of Cowper," p. 114.

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and the strain of watching was almost insupportable. The burden on Newton's household expenses was serious, but his care for the poor lunatic was unremitting, his devotion unfailing. When the clouds lifted and the weary, tortured soul emerged once again into tranquillity, he wrote these words: "Upon the whole, I have not been weary of my cross. Besides the submission I owe to the Lord, I think I can hardly do or suffer too much for such a friend, yet sometimes my heart has been impatient and rebellious." Never was portrait more maliciously drawn than that which represents Newton as the harsh, canting, tyrannical, bigoted ex-slaver in Orders, tormenting and goading to madness by his eternal round of prayer-meetings and psalm-singing, the delicate, will-less victim of his zeal.

The "Olney Hymns," published in 1779, numbered in all 348, of which Newton contributed the major portion. The object of their composition is explained in the preface as "a desire to promote the faith and comfort of sincere Christians, and secondly, to raise a monument to perpetuate the remembrance of an intimate friendship." In the beginning of the century, when Sternhold and Hopkins¹ were fallen to be the butt of the wits and the ridicule of the profane, complaints were frequent as to the melancholy conditions into which psalmody had sunk. The devout raised their voices in hymnic-

¹ Thomas Sternhold (d. 1549) and John Hopkins (d. 1570) versified the Psalms. Their version was exceedingly popular for three centuries.—V. "Cowper's Letters," ed. by Lucas and Milford, p. 540.

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doggerel, now sunk for the most part into merciful oblivion—until dissenting Isaac Watts, crying out as men have done in all ages against the decay of vital religion, and disgusted with the want of poetic refinement in the hymns in the Independent Chapel at Southampton, published in 1707 his “Hymns and Spiritual Songs.” With the revival of religion, hymnology attained its highest expression. John Wesley published in 1780 his excellent “Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists”—a “body of experimental and practical religion,” which influenced long after the voice of the preachers was stilled and but the memory of the names remained. These verses shadow forth the lurking terror presently to grip Cowper, to overwhelm him in chaos and night :

The billows swell, the winds are high,
Clouds overcast my wintry sky ;
Out of the depths to thee I call,—
My fears are great, my strength is small—

And again the despondent note is sounded in the beautiful lines entitled “Walking with God” :

Oh for a closer walk with God !
A calm and heavenly frame ;
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb !

Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord ?
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word ?

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What peaceful hours I once enjoyed !
How sweet their memory still !
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.

It is hardly necessary to quote more. This hymn, with "Hark, my soul ! it is the Lord," "Jesus ! where'er thy people meet," "Sometimes a light surprises," "God moves in a mysterious way," and many others, forms part of our common heritage. If the poetical merits of the "Olney Hymns" are small, these verses gave expression to the mute aspirations of a hundred thousand souls, and were welcomed gladly, while theological controversies expended themselves in harmless thunders.

Cowper was already in middle life when he began to collaborate with Newton ; and many sorrows had he overpast on his journey. After the third attack of his malady his reading had ceased. Hope had fled ; he walked as one on whom irrevocable sentence had been passed ; his intelligence was numbed, his faculties were paralysed. His early love poems lay behind him, the "Memoir," the Huntingdon letters, the "Lines on a Thunderstorm," his share in the "Olney Hymns" ; but there was little promise of more from his pen. *Die ultimo* 1774 he wrote these melancholy verses :

Heu ! quam remotus vescor omnibus
Quibus fruebar sub lare patrio
Quam nescius jucunda quondam
Arva, domum, socios, reliqui !

He occupied his attention with gardening, accepted a leveret from a neighbour, and, when

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it was known that he found pleasure in his new charge, he had presently as many offered him "as would have stocked a paddock." He retained three, and turned carpenter for their accommodation. Years later, when Hugh Miller visited the poet's house in Olney, and found the immortal parlour turned into an infant school, with two dozen chubby children poring over their tasks, he saw the small port-hole through which the hares came leaping to their carpet games.¹ Cowper immortalized his favourites in his graceful paper in the "Gentleman's Magazine," June 1784. He wrote to Hill with a view to taking in pupils,² but a month later, "If it were to rain pupils, perhaps I might catch a tub full ; but till it does, the fruitlessness of my inquiries makes me think I must keep my Greek and Latin to myself."

Sir Thomas Hesketh died April 1778, and a small legacy fell to him ; this eased his straitened circumstances somewhat. In June of the same year Thurlow had become Chancellor, and the poet wrote congratulatory lines, but refused to communicate with him lest his letter might be so construed, "Pray remember the poor." In January 1780, after a pastorate of almost sixteen years, Newton was presented to the living of St. Mary Woolnoth, in London, by Mr. Thornton, his friend and patron.

By the right thinking, Newton's labours were held in grateful remembrance ; but his going was embittered by an unfortunate occurrence.

¹ "First Impressions of England."

² July 1776.

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Fire broke out in Olney, and many of the poor were rendered homeless. Newton exerted himself actively on behalf of the sufferers, and, acting solely in their interests, recommended that the November 5 illuminations should be discontinued, with all the attendant dangers. He preached against the custom in church, and anticipated that his request would meet with universal compliance. But when the day came, the people showed their determination to hold by their privileges. Never had Olney witnessed celebrations on such a lavish scale. A crowd of forty or fifty approached the vicarage and compelled Newton, to his bitter humiliation, to send them out money. His labours, he felt, had been in vain ; the ingratitude of those for whose sake he had spent himself to serve cut him to the quick. It is probable, as he informed his biographer (Mr. Cecil), he should " never have left the place while he lived had not such an incorrigible spirit prevailed in a parish he had long laboured to reform."

No one missed Newton more than Cowper, although the friendship was hardly so cordial as it had once been. But they had not passed out of each other's lives.

IV

NEWTON was succeeded in Olney by the curate of Weston. A less genial man than his predecessor, the Rev. Thomas Scott neither enjoyed similar intimacy with Cowper nor

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established ascendancy over him. But, by way of compensation, came Newton's friend, William Bull, an Independent minister of Newport Pagnell (Carissime Taurorum), "a man of letters and of genius, a master of fine imagination—or rather, not master of it," and a close friendship sprang up. The poet amused himself by drawing "mountains, valleys, woods and streams, and ducks and dabchicks"; attempted occasional verse, and was from time to time consulted by the cautious Olney folk on unimportant legal matters.

In 1780 a sensation was produced in the ranks of the theological party by the publication of Madan's "Thelyphthora," a plea for polygamy based on scriptural grounds. Cowper read the work, and declining at first to regard it seriously, forwarded an "impromptu" to Newton, who was amused by the epigram. The latter, however, presently viewing the business in a graver light, summoned his muscles "back to their pristine seriousness." On further reflection, Cowper was filled with indignation that such doctrines as were advocated in the "Thelyphthora" should be held by an Evangelical leader. He forgot that Madan had at one time shed a ray of comfort on his own darkness. Consumed with white heat, he wrote, and in 1781 published, his rejoinder through Johnson, a long poem entitled "Anti-Thelyphthora" in an anonymous quarto pamphlet. No one has ever ventured to praise this pasquinade, which, although it showed a certain metrical facility and satirical

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power, was unfortunately tainted by coarseness and vulgarity. Cowper, who later would fain have allowed the "Anti-Thelyphthora" to remain in obscurity, succeeded in being neither effective nor witty.¹ But he had at least fleshed his satiric blade.

The discovery once made that he could write thus facilely, he was unwilling to lay his pen aside. While Pitt reigned and Wilkes was being suspended from the House ; while Smollett was editing "The Briton" and Warren Hastings laying the foundations of the Indian Empire ; while England was losing the American Colonies and conquering Canada ; while Adam Smith was elaborating his system of economics and Hume and Robertson and Gibbon were the talk of literary circles ; while Burke and Sheridan were dazzling with their eloquence, Johnson writing his "Lives," Reynolds and Gainsborough painting their masterpieces, and the Whig wits collaborating in the "Rolliad"—Cowper was quietly penning his Letters and the "Moral Satires." On December 21, 1780, he wrote to Newton : "It will not be long, perhaps, before you will receive a poem called 'The Progress of Error.' That will be succeeded by another in due time, called 'Truth.'" In the following January "The Progress of Error" was dispatched to Newton and received the seal of his approval. To the two books already written he added "Table Talk," "Expostula-

¹ Some thirty years after Cowper's death, Southey discovered the authorship of the poem by accident. *V. Globe Cowper*, p. xlv.

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tion," "Hope," "Charity," "Conversation," and "Retirement," and the volume, which was published by Joseph Johnson¹ in February 1782, included his translations of Vincent Bourne. "Table Talk" was placed first, but the Preface written by Newton was, on account of its serious tone, withheld, at the publisher's suggestion, until the fifth edition. The theme was to be religion :

All other themes are sped,
Hackneyed and worn to the last flimsy thread—

and the poet, despite his assurances to the contrary, awaited his appearance in print with trepidation. He declared to Newton that "no censure of reviewers or other critical readers" would occasion him the smallest disturbance; but he dreaded the verdict of Dr. Johnson. "One of his pointed sarcasms," he wrote, "if he should happen to be displeased, would soon find its way into all companies and spoil the sale." But the Dictator, despite Judge Monboddo's declaration that he was "the most invidious and malignant man he had ever known, who praised neither author nor book that other people praised," read the volume and approved it.

With the exception of the "Critical Review"

¹ Cowper first came into touch with Johnson in 1781. In 1785 Johnson published "The Task." "The great author of the 'Rambler' has said, 'That a bookseller is the only Mæcenas of the modern world.' Without assenting to all the eulogy and all the satire implied in this remarkable sentiment, we may take a pleasure in observing that in the class of men so magnificently and sportively commended there are several individuals, each of whom a writer of the most delicate manners and exalted mind may justly esteem as a pleasing associate, and as a liberal friend. In this light Cowper regarded his bookseller, Mr. Johnson." "The Life of Cowper," by William Hayley, vol. iii., p. 310.

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the notices of the new volume were favourable. "These poems," the latter declared, "are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality ; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities or the power of genius requisite for so arduous an undertaking. . . . If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some more becoming disguise, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its beauty ; for, as this bard himself sweetly sings :

The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
Falls soporific on the listening ear."

The poetical world into which Cowper made his unobtrusive entry was arid and bare enough. The fields for the moment lay fallow, awaiting fresh tillage. "Epitaph" Hayley, whose "Ballads founded on Anecdotes of Animals" Blake illustrated, "ambled over the course without a competitor." From poetry lyrical inspiration had fled ; verse had become formal, correct, artificial, improved beyond measure. "To Dryden," Johnson decreed, "we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre, the refinement of our language, and

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much of the correctness of our sentiments. . . . What was said of Rome adorned by Augustus may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, 'lateritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit.' He found it brick and left it marble." Unanswerable the question despite Thomas Warton, "If Pope be not a poet, where is poetry to be found?" When Cowper wrote "The Task" the influence of Pope was almost expended. But he had dowered English poetry with a literature of new phrases; he had established a standard of correctness and advanced the couplet to such perfection that less skilful versifiers could neither hope to improve it nor avoid incurring the suspicion of direct imitation. Addison might commend the old ballad of "Chevy Chase," Thomson renounce the couplet vogue, Gray (whom Johnson called a mechanical poet to Boswell) indulge in novel lyric measures, Collins exercise his skill in new harmonies, mastery of the couplet remained the distinctive mark of poetic craft. During the thirty years previous to the penning of Johnson's lines, poetasters strove to retain the skill of their master, but, lacking his genius, they lowered his standard, and gradually the couplet system, toppling already in his lifetime, crumbled and broke. Chatterton cast back to mediævalism; the "Reliques" revived the ballad, never dead; Thomas Warton laboriously traced the obscure stream of our older verse; Joseph, discussing the beauties of the "Seasons," manfully attacked the Pope

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fetish. The spirit of poetry refused to be further trammelled by the restraints of the couplet. The truth of Cowper's complaint was recognized, that

Manner is all in all, whate'er is writ,
The substitute for genius, sense, and wit.

The poetic diction, against which Wordsworth girds, had taught a false method of singing and rendered song unnatural. "The business of a poet," said Imlac, "is to examine not the individual, but the species ; to remark general properties and large appearances. He does not number the streaks of the tulip or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest ; he is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features as recall the original to every mind, and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and to carelessness." But the age had premonitions of coming change. Thomson handed down, in the legacy of the "Seasons," his nature love ; the poetry of Gray—who had no dealings with the "great bear" or the literary men who acknowledged his dictatorship—sounded a pleasant note in the arid atmosphere ; vague aspirations towards nature-study moved in men's souls. If for the moment a fashion of decadent satire set in, a passing classic mode, feebly held to by a fry of poetasters ; if again the mists gathered, and threatened to settle

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darkly—it was impossible to do more than momentarily hinder the Romantic growth. To eradicate it was impossible. But when the “Lives” were completed in 1781, the fiat went forth, and it seemed as if the threatening murmur of rebellion was stilled. In the following year Cowper published “Table Talk,” and Johnson was pleased to speak in favourable terms of the volume. But he failed to observe its salient innovations; he failed to remark the absence of the Popeian inversions in the seemingly orthodox verse, and the utter neglect of the conventionalizing and generalizing principles enunciated in “Rasselas.”

It was undeniable that the volume contained great faults. Cowper was little qualified for the office of satirist of his age. He had neither the acuteness of Dryden nor the vitriolic fierceness of Churchill; he neither possessed marked originality nor commanded a wide intellectual range; he was censorious and partial. The sale of the volume was slow. Readers of poetry, finding nothing different in manner or in matter from the currency of the century, hesitated to purchase. But, if he was neither inspired with the divine ardour nor consumed by the poetic zeal of his successors, his teaching obtained in a hundred exclusive circles which had never read one line of Romaine, nor heard one syllable from the lips of John Wesley, and who regarded Whitefield with pious horror or undisguised contempt. These lines embody his attitude :

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Pity Religion has so seldom found
A skilful guide into poetic ground !
The flowers would spring where'er she deigned to
 stray,
And every muse attend her in her way.
Virtue indeed meets many a rhyming friend,
And many a compliment politely penned,
But unattired in that becoming vest
Religion weaves for her, and half undressed,
Stands in the desert shivering and forlorn,
A wintry figure, like a withered thorn.

He was sincere and simple in his expression ; the commonplace verse he brightened with gleams of humour and shrewd observation. He was a professing Christian, and in an age which boasted neither a Gray nor a Chatterton the experimentalist, austere and dull though he might be, with a definite motive for writing, was welcomed by the Moralist. And as he wrote, he was all the time the victim of crushing, hopeless despair. He was proof against argument, regarding his fate with fixed hopelessness : " reasoning might say one thing but fact said another." Newton cited the case of Simon Browne, who, convinced " he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish," resigned his pastoral charge, developed suicidal tendencies and continued in his delusion until his death. Cowper found his own case was " by far the most deplorable of the two." Under these conditions was the first volume written.

When Johnson was persuaded by Newton to

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undertake the publication of the "Moral Satires" he exposed himself to considerable financial risk. The theme was unpromising, the author unknown. Had Newton's "Preface" been inserted, the fate of the volume would have been sealed. As it was, the poet, depressed by the apathy of the reading public, wrote to Unwin,¹ in reply to a query as to whether he was intent on another volume, that, if he might account himself happy in having pleased the few, he was not rich enough to despise the many. He added that the lack of encouragement he had received precluded all immediate idea of any further publication. The public had neither the desire nor the necessity to imbibe somewhat repellent evangelical doctrines through the medium of inferior verse. The approval of Benjamin Franklin was, in some measure, compensation for the mortification caused by the unfavourable verdict of the "Critical Review"; but Cowper had little reason to expect to be borne immediately on the crest of the popular wave. Had he continued in sulky silence for the remainder of his days, his volume would have been quietly buried in some obscure corner, and the spot have remained unmarked, even by the literary archæologist.

Cowper spared himself no pains in his work. "To touch and re-touch," he wrote, "is, though some writers boast of negligence and others would be ashamed to show their foul copies, the secret of almost all good writing,

¹ Letter undated,

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especially in verse. I am never weary of it myself."¹ But his own verses too frequently stagger and hobble. These lines from the "Progress of Error," written in harsh mood, illustrate his failing :

Occiduous is a pastor of renown ;
When he has prayed and preached the Sabbath down,
With wire and catgut he concludes the day,
Quavering and semi-quavering care away. . . .
Oh fie ! 'Tis evangelical and pure :
Observe each face, how sober and demure !
Ecstasy sets her stamp on every mien
Chins fallen, and not an eyeball to be seen.

Cowper lashing the world is one thing ; Cowper administering correction to a delinquent trussed and bound, is a wholly different spectacle. In the eyes of the quiet Olney household the incarnation of all that was godless and worldly was the Earl of Chesterfield, on whose satiric portraiture the poet employed unsparing pencil :

Petronius ! all the Muses weep for thee,
But every tear shall scald thy memory.
The Graces too, while Virtue at their shrine
Lay bleeding under that soft hand of thine,
Felt each a mortal stab in her own breast,
Abhorred the sacrifice, and cursed the priest :
Thou polished and high-finished foe to truth,
Grey-beard corrupter of our listening youth,
To purge and skim away the filth of vice,
That so refined it might the more entice,
Then pour it on the morals of thy son
To taint *his* heart, was worthy of *thine own*.

¹ To the Rev. William Unwin, July 2, 1780.

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Cowper's ignorance of the world and his lack of reasoned conviction was an indictment against his work. He was inconsistent in his attitude, and liable to be constantly influenced by the personal factor. A passage in "Expostulation," objectionable to Papists, was with Newton's approval excised, when he had made the acquaintance of the Catholic Throckmortons; but, despite his evangelical fervour, he later became the inseparable companion of Padre Gregson, their chaplain, who transcribed Homer for him. The cancelled passage runs as follows :

Hast thou admitted with a blind, fond trust,
The lie that burn'd thy fathers' bones to dust,
That first adjudged them heretics, then sent
Their souls to heav'n, and cursed them as they
went ?

The lie that Scripture strips of its disguise,
And execrates above all other lies,
The lie that claps a lock on mercy's plan,
And gives the key to yon infirm old man,
Who once insconced in apostolic chair
Is deified and sits omniscient there ;
The lie that knows no kindred, owns no friend
But him that makes its progress his chief end,
That having spilt much blood, makes that a boast,
And canonizes him that sheds the most ?
Away with charity that soothes a lie,
And thrusts the truth with scorn and anger by ;
Shame on the candour and the gracious smile
Bestow'd on them that light the martyr's pile,
While insolent disdain in frowns express'd
Attends the tenets that endured that test ;

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Grant them the rights of men, and while they cease
To vex the peace of others, grant them peace ;
But trusting bigots whose false zeal has made
Treach'ry their duty, thou art self-betray'd.

He censured the practice of smoking in
"Conversation" ; but there was infinite excuse
for his friend Bull.

Forgive the bard, if bard he be,
Who once too wantonly made free,
To touch with a satiric wipe,
That symbol of thy power, the pipe ; . . .
And so may smoke-inhaling Bull
Be always filling, never full.¹

He condemned the "slumbering oscitancy" of
colleges, but had no word of reproach for Benet
College :

In which order yet
Was sacred.

He was probably unaware, when he vindicated
the memory of Whitefield (Leuconomus) in
"Hope," that his hero was an advocate of
slavery. The city he remembered merely as the
Babel from which he had made his escape :

humming with a restless crowd
Sordid as active, ignorant as loud
Whose highest praise is that they live in vain,
The dupes of pleasure or the slaves of gain !
Where works of man are clustered close around
And works of God are hardly to be found.

But there was abundant evidence of higher

¹ Epistle to the Rev. William Bull, June 22, 1782,

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capacity in the *Satires*. "Retirement," freed from the harsh versification of the earlier work, and with the inexactitude of the rhymes improved beyond measure, is distinguished by high descriptive faculty and genuine poetic feeling. Cowper was wholly destitute of constructive power; he was unable to develop continuously a single idea, incapable of winding into the heart of his subject or of elaborating a consistent philosophy. The distractions of his retirement rendered impossible continuous concentration. Earlier the Elizabethan pamphleteers had denounced poetry, levelled venomous and uncritical attacks against the art and function of the poet. With Sidney—who still and utterly denied that there was sprung out of earth a more fruitful knowledge—as with Cowper, the end of poetry was to teach and delight. Wilson argued on behalf of the moral value of poetry, "for undoubtedly there is no one tale among all the Poets, but under the same is comprehended something that pertaineth either to the amendment of manners, to the knowledge of truth, to the setting forth of Nature's work. . . . The Poets were wise men and wished in heart the redress of things." In similar fashion Cowper might have reasoned. Judged by Webbe's standard his poetry would satisfy all the necessary requirements: "The perfect perfection of poetry is this, to mingle delight with profit in such wise that a reader might by his reading be partaker of both." The Elizabethan defence argued that poetry

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was the sugar-coating of the pill, the candy with the dose of rhubarb ; the kernel the *moralitas*, the poet the right popular philosopher. Cowper sought to instruct his age, to strip and whip abuse entertainingly. Unconcerned with æsthetic theories of his art, he wrote : " My sole drift is to be useful : a point at which, however, I know I should in vain aim, unless I could be likewise entertaining. I have therefore fixed these two strings to my bow ; and by the help of both have done my best to send my arrow to the mark. My readers will hardly have begun to laugh before they will be called upon to correct that levity and peruse me with a more serious air. I cast a sidelong glance at the good liking of the world at large, more for the sake of the advantage and instruction than their praise. They are children : if we give them physic we must sweeten the rim of the cup with honey." Cowper sought to teach and delight, caring neither to teach without delighting nor to delight without teaching, and disseminated in this manner the teaching of the Evangelical school. " Charity " espoused the cause of the slave ; " Expostulation," which the poet declared that he wrote with tolerable ease to himself, held up the fate of the Jewish race before the eyes of England. The theme of " Truth," second in order of composition, is man's universal need of salvation. " The Progress of Error," the first written of the series, is the general assertion that the fashionable vices of the day account

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for the degeneracy of humanity. Of "Table Talk," which he placed first in the volume, reminiscent of the Drydenian manner, he wrote:¹ "I send you 'Table Talk.' It is a medley of many things, some that may be useful and some that, for aught I know, may be very diverting. I am merry that I may decoy people into my company, and grave that they may be the better for it. Now and then I put on the garb of a philosopher, and take the opportunity that disguise procures me to drop a word in favour of religion. . . . A poet in my circumstances has a difficult part to act : one minute obliged to bridle his humour, if he has any ; and the next, to clap a spur to the sides of it : now ready to weep from a sense of the importance of his subject, and on a sudden constrained to laugh, lest his gravity should be mistaken for dullness."

Embedded in the dull framework of moralizing are found such excellent vignettes as those of the ancient Prude in "Truth," taken from Hogarth's "Morning," and Sir Smug in "Hope" :

Yon ancient prude, whose withered features show
She might be young some forty years ago,
Her elbows pinioned close upon her hips,
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,
Her eyebrows arched, her eyes both gone astray.
To watch yon amorous couple in their play,
With bony and unkerchiefed neck defies
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,
And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs
Duly at clink of bell, to morning prayers.

¹ To the Rev. John Newton, February 18, 1781.

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To thrift and parsimony much inclined,
She yet allows herself that boy behind ;
The shivering urchin, bending as he goes,
With slipshod heels, and dew-drop at his nose,
His predecessors' coat advanced to wear,
Which future pages are yet doomed to share ;
Carries her Bible tucked beneath his arm,
And hides his hands to keep his fingers warm.

She, half an angel in her own account,
Doubts not hereafter with the saints to mount,
Though not a grace appears on strictest search,
But that she fasts, and, *item*, goes to church.
Conscious of age, she recollects her youth,
And tells, not always with an eye to truth,
Who spanned her waist, and who, where'er he
came,

Scrawled upon glass Miss Bridget's lovely name,
Who stole her slipper, filled it with Tokay,
And drank the little bumper every day.
Of temper as envenomed as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp ;
In faithful memory she records the crimes
Or real or fictitious, of the times ;
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm's length in scorn.

Sighing and smiling as he takes his glass,
Which they that woo preferment rarely pass,
" Fallible man," the church-bred youth replies,
" Is still found fallible, however wise ;
And differing judgments serve but to declare,
That truth lies somewhere, if we knew but where.
Of all it ever was my lot to read,
Of critics now alive, or long since dead,
The book of all the world that charmed me most
Was—well-a-day, the title page was lost ;

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The writer well remarks, a heart that knows
To take with gratitude what Heaven bestows,
With prudence always ready at our call,
To guide our use of it, is all in all.
Doubtless it is. To which, of my own store,
I superadd a few essentials more ;
But these, excuse the liberty I take,
I waive just now, for conversation sake."—
"Spoke like an oracle !" they all exclaim,
And add Right Reverend to Smug's honoured
name.

The spirit of "Conversation," which reminds
of the letters, is light and kindly ; the versifi-
cation is natural and spontaneous. One passage,
although it may rank low as poetry, stamped
with a quiet homely beauty, breathes the very
essence of the Christian spirit in lines of quiet
dignity :

It happened on a solemn eventide,
Soon after He that was our surety died,
Two bosom friends, each pensively inclined,
The scene of all those sorrows left behind,
Sought their own village, busied as they went
In musings worthy of the great event :
They spake of him they loved, of him whose life,
Though blameless, had incurred perpetual strife,
Whose deeds had left, in spite of hostile arts,
A deep memorial graven on their hearts.
The recollection, like a vein of ore,
The farther traced, enriched them still the more ;
They thought him, and they justly thought him, one
Sent to do more than he appeared to have done,
To exalt a people, and to place them high
Above all else, and wondered he should die.

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Ere yet they brought their journey to an end,
A stranger joined them, courteous as a friend,
And asked them with a kind engaging air
What their affliction was, and begged a share.
Informed, he gathered up the broken thread,
And, truth and wisdom gracing all he said,
Explained, illustrated, and searched so well
The tender theme, on which they chose to dwell,
That reaching home, "The night," they said, "is
near,

We must not now be parted, sojourn here."
The new acquaintance soon became a guest,
And, made so welcome at their simple feast,
He blessed the bread, but vanished at the word,
And left them both exclaiming, "'Twas the Lord !
Did not our hearts feel all he deigned to say,
Did they not burn within us by the way ? "

The humour of the "Satires" is peculiarly Cowper's own. The "bowing, smirking, smart Abbé" in the "Progress of Error," who encounters the two English travellers,

Points to inscriptions wheresoe'er they tread,
Such as when legible were never read, . . .
Exhibits elevations, drawings, plans,
Models of Herculanean pots and pans,
And sells them medals, which, if neither rare
Nor ancient, will be so, preserved with care.

There are clever individual lines and couplets which fix themselves naturally in the memory. Thus :

Absence of occupation is not rest
A mind quite vacant is a mind distressed.

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A noisy man is always in the right.

Men deal with life, as children with their play,
Who first misuse, then cast their toys away ;
Live to no sober purpose, and contend
That their Creator had no serious end.

Such, the "teapot pieties" of Cowper !

The publication of his volume exposed Cowper not only to the onslaught of the critics, but to an additional mortification for which he himself was responsible. He forwarded a copy of his work to Thurlow, accompanied by the following letter :

"Olney, Bucks,
Feb. 25, 1782.

"My Lord,—I make no apology for what I account a duty ; I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship should I send a volume into the world, and forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your Lordship upon that occasion. When we parted you little thought of hearing from me again ; and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

"Among the pieces I have the honour to send, there is one for which I must entreat your pardon. I mean that of which your Lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connexion that did me so much honour.

"As to the rest, their merits, if they have

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any, and their defects, which are probably more than I am aware of, will neither of them escape your notice. But where there is much discernment, there is generally much candour ; and I commit myself into your Lordship's hands, with the less anxiety, being well acquainted with yours.

" If my first visit after so long an interval should prove neither a troublesome nor a dull one, but especially if not altogether an unprofitable one, *omne tui punctum*.

" I have the honour to be, though with very different impressions of some subjects, yet with the same sentiments of affection and esteem as ever, your Lordship's faithful and most obedient, humble servant,

" W. C."

He awaited acknowledgment of his gift in vain. He informed Unwin that when Hill had mentioned the approaching publication of the volume, the Chancellor returned no answer, and that later his " poor authorship was not so much as mentioned." Colman, who had produced the " Jealous Wife " in 1761, and from whom, on account of the early Temple intimacy, the poet expected at least acknowledgment, ignored his gift likewise. Both turned a deaf ear to the voice of one whom they regarded as belonging to the melancholy army of life's failures. Cowper, deeply wounded, penned his " Valediction," which he forwarded to Unwin. This poem, which remained unpublished until

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after the death of Colman and Thurlow,
began :

Farewell, false hearts ! whose best affections fail,
Like shallow brooks which summer suns exhale !
Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,
Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes,
I bid you both a long and last adieu,
Cold in my turn, and unconcerned like you.

The " Monthly Review " had termed Cowper a poet " sui generis " and accorded him high praise. But neither the trite moral maxims of the " Progress of Error " nor the Evangelicism of " Truth " could assure of literary salvation. It lay with him still to justify the reviewer's verdict.

" Tirocinium " is a moral satire of somewhat later date.¹ Cowper had already passed middle life when he attacked the public school system of his day. His object was " to censure the want of discipline and the scandalous inattention to morals that obtain in them, especially in the largest, and to recommend private tuition as a mode of education preferable on all accounts." Elsewhere he wrote : " I do not know that schools in the gross, and especially public schools, have ever been so pointedly condemned before. But they are become a nuisance, a pest, an abomination ; and it is fit that the eyes and noses of mankind should, if possible, be opened to perceive it." Here the theologian speaks and the recluse ; the man of culture

¹ Two hundred lines of the poem were written in 1782 and it was resumed in 1784.

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never sought to deny the intellectual advantage of a Westminster education. It was the recollection of the many "acts of barbarism" endured at Market Street that inspired his lines. He had, in an earlier paper "On Secrets," contributed to the "Connoisseur" ¹ his opinion on school education: "The management of young gentlemen is equally absurd. In most of our schools, if the lad is discovered in a scrape, the impeachment of an accomplice, as at the Old Bailey, is made the condition of a pardon."

In "Tirocinium" Cowper protested against the inevitable weakening of the ties between parent and child under the public school system, and condemned its cherished spirit of emulation as productive of little but evil.

Our public hives of puerile resort
That are of chief and most approved report,
To such base hopes, in many a sordid soul
Owe their repute in part, but not the whole.
A principle whose proud pretensions pass
Unquestioned, though the jewel be but glass,
That with a world not often over-nice
Ranks as a virtue, and is yet a vice ;
Or rather a gross compound, justly tried,
Of envy, hatred, jealousy, and pride—
Contributes most perhaps to enhance their fame,
And emulation is its specious name.
Boys, once on fire with that contentious zeal,
Feel all the rage that female rivals feel :
The prize of beauty in a woman's eyes
Not brighter than in theirs the scholar's prize.

¹ No. 119.

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The spirit of that competition burns
With all varieties of ills by turns ;
Each vainly magnifies his own success,
Resents his fellow's, wishes it were less,
Exults in his miscarriage if he fail,
Deems his reward too great if he prevail,
And labours to surpass him day and night,
Less for improvement than to tickle spite.
The spur is powerful, and I grant its force ;
It pricks the genius forward in its course,
Allows short time for play, and none for sloth :
And, felt alike by each, advances both :
But judge, where so much evil intervenes,
The end, though plausible, not worth the means.
Weigh, for a moment, classical desert
Against a heart depraved and temper hurt ;
Hurt too perhaps for life, for early wrong,
Done to the nobler part, affects it long ;
And you are staunch indeed in learning's cause
If you can crown a discipline, that draws
Such mischiefs after it, with much applause.

The dullness, the halting nature of much of the verse of the " Satires " arose from the fact that the poet, marching blindly forward, was too frequently uncertain of his objective and unfamiliar with his ground. But here he advances, nothing doubting. If for a moment memory rises gently ; if a wave of tender recollection softens his mood of bitterness and he can declare feelingly :

We love the play-place of our early days.
The scene is touching, and the heart is stone
That feels not at that sight, and feels at none,

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the irresistible logic of facts speedily crushes these sentiments, and he harshly demands :

Then why resign into a stranger's hand
A task as much within your own command,
That God and Nature, and your interest too,
Seem with one voice to delegate to you ?
Why hire a lodging in a house unknown
For one whose tenderest thoughts all hover round
your own ?

This second weaning, needless as it is,
How does it lacerate both your heart and his !
The indented stick, that loses day by day
Notch after notch, till all are smoothed away,
Bears witness, long ere his dismissal come,
With what intense desire he wants his home.
But though the joys he hopes beneath your roof
Bid fair enough to answer in the proof,
Harmless and safe, and natural, as they are,
A disappointment waits him even there :
Arrived, he feels an unexpected change,
He blushes, hangs his head, is shy and strange ;
No longer takes, as once with fearless ease,
His favourite stand between his father's knees,
But seeks the corner of some distant seat,
And eyes the door, and watches a retreat ;
And least familiar where he should be most,
Feels all his happiest privileges lost.
Alas, poor boy !—the natural effect
Of love by absence chilled into respect.

While the poet was realizing that the "Satires" had not brought him fame, he received from William Bull three volumes of poetry, composed by Madame Guyon. He translated several of the poems with his cordial encouragement—verses

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bearing on such themes as divine love, gratitude to God, and self-surrender, which were posthumously published ; and for the moment there was little danger of a return of his malady. He was busy ; he had the company of Lady Austen ; his letters dating from this period are filled with humour and playfulness ; despair, it almost seemed, had fled. Presently we find him occupied with " The Task."

V

IT was during the time that Cowper was still busy over " Charity," while the dark clouds came and went and the first new old notes of revolt rose quaveringly, that a new personality entered his life : " a lively, agreeable woman, who had seen much of the world, and accounted it a great simpleton, as it is—one who laughed and made laugh, and could keep up a conversation without seeming to labour at it." Gazing one day idly from his window, he saw two ladies enter the draper's shop across the street ; one was Mrs. Jones of Clifton, the other Lady Austen, her sister, a widow. Mrs. Unwin invited them to tea, but the poet's bashfulness leaping on him, forbade him to enter the company. Mastering himself at last, however, he stole shyly into the room, talked gaily, convoyed the guests home, and afterward returned the visit with his companion.¹

¹ Cowper made Lady Austen's acquaintance July 1781. The "Moral Satires" were published February 1782.

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Toward the close of the year he wrote to her ladyship :

But who can tell how vast the plan,
Which this day's incident began ?

Had he not mastered his diffidence and forced himself into the company, it is improbable he would ever have discovered the full measure of his genius or that we should have had the true revelation of himself ; it is unlikely he would have left his generous legacy to prosperity.

Lady Austen was before long " Sister Anne " ; the poet " Brother William." As the weather held good, there was a pleasant little luncheon-party in the Spinney, to which sat down Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, Lady Austen, and Mr. and Mrs. Jones. Her Ladyship's lackey and a lad that waited on the poet in the garden, drove a wheelbarrow full of eatables and drinkables to the scene of the *fête champêtre*. Thither too went Hannah Willson, with her head as yet unfilled with her romantic nonsense, which brought little comfort to the sad Weston household in later days. When her ladyship returned to London with the idea of settling in Olney, she proposed a correspondence. Cowper gladly accepted the idea and penned his letters gaily until, some absurd romantic notion entering her ladyship's foolish head, we learn that the friendship that promised so fair is at an end. The poet had written something that gave offence, and stood on his dignity. An apology healed the breach for the moment ; " but at

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length," he writes to Unwin,¹ "having had repeated occasion to observe that she expressed a sort of romantic idea of our merits, and built such expectations of felicity upon our friendship as we were sure that nothing human could possibly answer, I wrote to remind her that we were mortal, to recommend it to her not to think more highly of us than the subject would warrant, and intimated that when we embellish a creature with colours taken from our own fancy, and so adorned, admire and praise it beyond its real merits, we make it an idol, and have nothing to expect in the end but that it will deceive our hopes, and that we shall derive nothing from it but a painful conviction of our error. . . ." The letter "gave mortal offence : it received indeed an answer, but such an one as I could by no means reply to ; and there ended (for it was impossible it should ever be renewed) a friendship that bid fair to be lasting."

By the following June, however, the poet, gratified with the present of three pairs of ruffles, had made his peace, and Lady Austen had returned to the Olney neighbourhood. She took apartments in the vicarage, and the private gate in the wall, closed since Newton's departure, was reopened for her convenience. She had a constant flow of lively conversation and was a skilled performer on the harpsichord ; Mrs. Unwin was tranquil and contented ; the poet cheerful and busied with his correspondence.

February 9, 1782.

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He danced attendance on the ladies in the morning and in the evening wound thread. He had his books forwarded from his London library, from Bull and Unwin, and fell into the habit of reading aloud. In this fashion life glided past, and for the moment there was no cloud on the horizon. But presently he fell silent, and neither her ladyship's gaiety nor the tranquillity of Mrs. Unwin could dispel his black cloud of melancholy. Not until Lady Austen told him the story of Gilpin did the gloom disperse. Its drollery made an irresistible appeal to his sense of humour ; he retired, and by the following morning the rough draft of the immortal ballad was composed. He secluded himself for several days in his greenhouse, expanding and polishing it ; and dispatched the finished sheets to Barber Wilson across the street. When completed to his satisfaction, he forwarded it to the "Public Advertiser," where it appeared anonymously, November 1782. It was not long before every one was acquainted with it ; it was hackneyed in every magazine and newspaper, it was recited by Henderson in the Freemasons' Hall before Mrs. Siddons ; and the author was induced to attempt an unsuccessful sequel. Poor tortured soul writing these verses which Hazlitt and a hundred others have so ungrudgingly praised ; " the grinners at ' John Gilpin ' little think what its writer sometimes suffered ! "

Cowper had little inventive genius. It was Mrs. Unwin who suggested the "Progress of

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Error," and Lady Austen who inspired "John Gilpin," "The Task," and the lines on the "Loss of the 'Royal George.'" Cowper, left to himself, translated the "Iliad." Urged now by Lady Austen to write something in blank verse, he complained of inability to find a suitable theme. "You can never be in want of a subject," her impatient ladyship replied, "you can write upon anything—write upon this sofa." The hint was taken, and the work commenced which was to establish beyond all question his pre-eminence among his contemporaries. "The Sofa," begun in mock-heroic strain, developed into "The Task"; which labour led to consequences wholly unexpected. Cowper wrote busily—*nulla dies sine lineâ*, as Tully had laid down—and could barely spare the time for paying his devoirs to her exacting ladyship every morning at eleven. He grew restive, but politeness constrained; his attentions were unrelaxed, until a new factor complicated the situation. Gradually a light broke and suspicion became certainty—Lady Austen was in love with him! He thought the situation over, taking no blame to himself, sat down at his desk and penned "a very tender yet resolute letter," wherein he explained and lamented the circumstances that forced him to renounce her society. Her ladyship received the missive, read it, crimsoned, committed it to the flames; this time no more presents of ruffles. Poor gentle, chastened poet—charming companion whom Lamb and Coleridge loved,

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sad broken spirit with madness not far away and melancholy sitting at the board, how pleasant must have been that fleeting friendship ! A thousand pities that the worldly little lady who drove dull care away and brought gentle laughter to those lips should have been injudicious enough to fall in love with our poet, too ! Very beautiful is the tribute to Mrs. Unwin which he later inserted in "The Task," when the breach with Lady Austen still freshly rankled :

And witness, dear companion of my walks,
Whose arm this twentieth winter I perceive
Fast locked in mine, with pleasure such as love,
Confirmed by long experience of thy worth
And well-tried virtues, could alone inspire,
Witness a joy that thou hast doubled long.
Thou knowest my praise of nature most sincere,
And that my raptures are not conjured up
To serve occasions of poetic pomp,
But genuine, and art partner of them all.

It was well for your ladyship that your poet wrote that letter—well that his heart was honourably in Mrs. Unwin's keeping. Had your sprightly personality been linked to his, listening continually "to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted," you, who saw but the fleeting shadows on the surface of that unplumbed lake, had known misery and despair as your lasting portion.¹

¹ Lady Austen married M. de Tardiff. She died in 1802.

"As appears from the ledger of Mr. Grindon, Lady Austen was staying with her sister at Clifton again in August 1786, and also in March 1787. But Cowper and she were now strangers to each other. Although only two miles separated them, there was no communication between her and the poet."—T. Wright, "Life of Cowper," p. 351.

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Writing on July 12, 1784, to Unwin, Cowper had a certain diffidence in approaching the subject of the disagreement. But finally : “ You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our near neighbour, is probably there ; she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connexion on some accounts an inconvenient one ; that we do not wish to renew it ; and conduct yourself accordingly.” The poet has definitely made up his mind in the matter, but beyond the bare facts of the case Unwin learns little from this letter. Eighteen months later Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh : “ There came a lady into this country, by name and title Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney ; but in a few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company, and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made

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doors in the two garden-walls abovesaid, by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other, and could meet when we pleased without entering the town at all—a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume and not begun my second) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon became laws. I began ‘The Task’; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing, and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect ‘The Task’ to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill-health, and before I had quite finished the work was obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I mentioned was removed, and now, except the Bull [Mr. Bull] that I spoke of, we seldom have any company at all.

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After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me, perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add, therefore, that, having paid my morning visit, I walked ; returning from my walk, I dressed : we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night."

There is, however, a matter of which the poet has not spoken—two verses which "those who were acquainted with the unsuspecting innocence and sportive gaiety of Cowper would readily allow . . . are such as he might have addressed to a real sister." To Hayley "they appeared expressive of that peculiarity in his character, a gay and tender gallantry, perfectly distinct from amorous attachment." Her ladyship unfortunately, who knew the world so well, thought otherwise. The verses are entitled, "'To a Lady' who wore a lock of his hair set with diamonds." ¹

Lady Austen gone, "The Task" progressed but Cowper's loneliness increased. For one brief moment the darkness lifted, alas ! "a flash in a dark night during which the heavens seemed opened only to shut again." He was largely dependent on the society of Barber Wilson, who, when he turned Baptist, refused to dress Lady Austen's coiffure on Sundays ; and strutting, pinched, pompous, but withal

¹ Four lines of the poem ran :

"The heart that beats beneath that breast
Is William's well I know,
A nobler prize and richer far
Than India could bestow."

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good-hearted, religious schoolmaster Teedon, who kept school in the Shiel Hall and a diary. With the Reverend Thomas Scott he was, we gather, on terms of no intimacy. He had, however, made the acquaintance of the Throckmortons, a Catholic family whose seat was at Weston Underwood, little more than a mile from Olney. Cowper, since his residence in the town, had been allowed a key of the park ; and when the possessor died in 1782, he sent a complimentary card to his successor¹ requesting the continuance of that privilege. This was granted, but the acquaintance did not extend beyond this correspondence. When interest in ballooning was aroused throughout the country, and Montgolfier was already a famous name and Lunardi soon to attract universal attention, among others interested in aeronautics were the Throckmortons. In May, 1784, the poet and Mrs. Unwin were invited to witness a balloon ascent from their grounds and entertained with the utmost politeness. Their hosts, who had lately "received many gross affronts from the people of this place on account of their religion," were at first shy with strangers ; but this friendship prospered. Cowper sang their praises to Unwin, to Newton, to Lady Hesketh : Throckmorton was a gentleman—a fact which gave the poet pleasure—a peerless neighbour, amiable and well informed ; and, priceless boon to bookless Cowper, the library was at his disposal.

¹ A younger brother, John Throckmorton, son of Sir Robert, who resided at the family seat of Bucklands in Berkshire. The old baronet died in 1791, and Cowper's friend succeeded to the title.

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Thus Lady Austen had barely flounced away, leaving our poet sore-hearted, when these new friends came into his life. For him they greatly lightened the burden.

While busied over "The Task" Cowper was reticent on the subject to Newton, who had exercised careful censorship over the earlier volume. He chronicled with inimitable grace small Olney happenings; he discussed his soul's state, discoursed on South Sea dancing and the vagaries of Geary Ball; but spoke no word of his design. October 11,¹ he dispatched his "four quires of verse" to Unwin, with instructions to offer the manuscript to Johnson, and, failing him, to Longman. October 30, he communicated his information to Newton casually, adding apologetically, "I mentioned it not sooner, because almost to the last I was doubtful whether I should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind as, while it spurred me to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify me for it." Newton was mortified, and refused to be pacified by hasty verses as was Unwin earlier; mortified enough, hard-working in his city charge, with a thousand-and-one ministerial harassments. He replied civilly enough, however, and sought further information; was refused the proof-sheets "absolutely, though civilly," but received a copy of the arguments and an extract. These he sharply criticized, taking exception to the blank verse and generally

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throwing cold water on the design. The poet replied with spirit. So for the moment the matter rested. In June 1785, while Carey,¹ who had joined Mr. Sutcliff's Baptist chapel at Olney, was preparing to preach his first sermon, the new volume, which included "Tirocinium," "John Gilpin," and the "Epistle to Joseph Hill," was in the hands of the public.

The poet had little ground for complaint with the reception of his new volume ; its success was complete. His verse, if didactic, lacked the hard glitter of intellectualism : his devotional passages were acceptable to readers of his theological way of thinking, while his instinctive sympathy for the lower creation appealed to humanitarians :

I would not enter in my list of friends
(Though graced with polished manners and fine
 sense,
Yet wanting sensibility) the man
Who needlessly sets foot upon a worm.

Cowper's poetry pulsed with human emotion ; it throbbed with the charm of a sympathetic personality, and, if lacking the overmastering impulse compelling poetic activity, it possessed honesty and sincerity of purpose. As he wrote, Burns and Wordsworth stood already at the threshold : the forces were gathering which were presently to overwhelm convention in the chaos of revolution.

When the tumult of the outside world pene-

¹ William Carey, 1761-1834.

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trated beyond the closed shutters of Orchard Side, the poet, conscious of mighty national stirrings, of the weakness and the strength of the times, was consumed by passionate love of country :

England, with all thy faults, I love thee still,
My country ! and, while yet a nook is left
Where English minds and manners may be found,
Shall be constrained to love thee.

But his fire kindled slowly ; it gleamed dully, neither illuminating fiercely nor warming. Sombrely, he might trace in the woes of mankind the divine punishment ; bemoan prodigies and earthquakes ; in sadness write :

My ear is pained
My soul is sick with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled ;

sentimentalism might tide over him, vaguely conscious of universal movement and unrest among the nations, heralding engulfing revolution : but, not after this manner are world-moving reformers fashioned ; not to such is given to speak with cloven tongues. A Pisgah sight he obtains, then descends again dully.

" The Task " resembles the conversation of one dowered with no special gifts of intellect ; of an interesting quiet man, of humour and austerity with an intensely human hand-grip. Now he is philosophical, now descriptive ; now he grows grave, now waxes playful ; now he emerges from the shadow into the sunshine and

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peace of soul is restored ; now he views with sympathy dull lives passed amid

The bay of curs

Incessant, clinking hammers, grinding wheels,

And infants clamorous whether pleased or pained ;

now he employs his brush on some calm interior ;
now depicts

The waggoner who bears

The pelting brunt of the tempestuous night,

With half-shut eyes and puckered cheeks, and teeth

Presented bare against the storm.

His Puritanism, his primness of deportment, his uncompromising Evangelicism had repelled in the earlier volume. It is otherwise here.

When he wrote :

Retreat

Cannot indeed to guilty man restore

Lost innocence, or cancel follies past ;

But it has peace,

he was echoing Rousseau's teaching, in revolt against the cold bitterness of the uncomprehending world. But, like Crabbe, he does not lose hold on realism, and paints this portrait of Crazy Kate with minute pencil.

There often wanders one, whom better days

Saw better clad, in cloak of satin trimmed

With lace, and hat with splendid riband bound.

A serving-maid was she, and fell in love

With one who left her, went to sea, and died.

Her fancy followed him through foaming waves

To distant shores, and she would sit and weep

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At what a sailor suffers ; fancy too,
Delusive most where warmest wishes are,
Would oft anticipate his glad return,
And dream of transports she was not to know.
She heard the doleful tidings of his death,
And never smiled again. And now she roams
The dreary waste ; there spends the livelong day,
And there, unless when charity forbids,
The livelong night. A tattered apron hides,
Worn as a cloak, and hardly hides, a gown
More tattered still ; and both but ill conceal
A bosom heaved with never-ceasing sighs.
She begs an idle pin of all she meets,
And hoards them in her sleeve ; but needful food,
Though pressed with hunger oft, or comelier clothes,
Though pinched with cold, asks never. Kate is
crazed.

He boldly advocates temperance reform in the
“ Winter Evening ” :

Pass where we may, through city or through town,
Village or hamlet, of this merry land,
Though lean and beggared, every twentieth pace
Conducts the unguarded nose to such a whiff
Of stale debauch, forth issuing from the styes
That law has licensed, as makes temperance reel.
There sit, involved and lost in curling clouds
Of Indian fume, and guzzling deep, the boor,
The lackey, and the groom ; the craftsman there
Takes a Lethean leave of all his toil ;
Smith, cobbler, joiner, he that plies the shears,
And he that kneads the dough ; all loud alike,
All learnèd, and all drunk. The fiddle screams
Plaintive and piteous, as it wept and wailed
Its wasted tones and harmony unheard ;

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Fierce the dispute, whate'er the theme ; while she,
Fell Discord, arbitress of such debate,
Perched on the sign-post, holds with even hand
Her undecisive scales.

If erroneous his assumption, that a life of rural ease and leisure is more friendly to the cause of piety and virtue than a life of action, if he too often beats empty air petulantly, Cowper's abstract view of moral obliquity and his denunciations of the cancers of society are essentially sane and sound. But his zeal was apt to outrun his discretion ; he knew little in his still garden of what passed beyond his walls. He had fled from a world in which there was much that was beautiful and good, and, remembering only its sorrow and its pain, he frowned when he heard the sound of its innocent laughter. His reflections too frequently lacked the faculty of giving to think ; they were reflections such as Mrs. Unwin might have made, or the Reverend John Newton in the Olney parlour. But the Evangelical poet went further than Rousseau, who discovered that the rottenness in the existing scheme of things arose from man's departure from the ideal state of nature. He grows enthusiastic over liberty, prophesies the fall of the Bastille, defines the Whiggish attitude toward monarchy, essentially moderate and anti-revolutionary :

We love

The king who loves the law, respects his bounds,
And reigns content within them : him we serve

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Freely and with delight, who leaves us free :
But recollecting still that he is man,
We trust him not too far.

There is a higher emancipation. Nobler than
the patriot in the eyes of God is the martyr.

He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside.

The regeneration of man and the extirpation of
existing evils was to be effected neither by
philosophic "rant and rhapsody in virtue's
praise" nor by drastic legislation. Calvinistic
Cowper, labouring under the burden of his
times, and convinced, in a darkening age, of
the corruption of man's whole nature, fell back
on an older remedy :

Acquaint thyself with God, if thou wouldst taste
His works. . . .

The soul that sees Him, or receives sublimed
New faculties, or learns at least to employ
More worthily the powers she owned before,
Discerns in all things what, with stupid gaze
Of ignorance, till then she overlooked,
A ray of heavenly light gilding all forms
Terrestrial, in the vast and the minute,
The unambiguous footsteps of the God
Who gives its lustre to an insect's wing,
And wheels His throne upon the rolling worlds.

So Cowper stands, backward looking and forward looking.

"My descriptions," he writes, "are all from
nature ; not one of them second-handed. My

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delineations of the heart are from my own experiences ; not one of them borrowed from books or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I varied as much as I could . . . I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance, because at the same time that I would not imitate I have not affectedly differed." His background is Olney scenery : the " Peasant's Nest," the chestnut avenue, the rustic bridge, the gulf

in which the willows dip
Their pendant boughs, stooping as if to drink,

the alcove, the sheepfold pouring out " its
fleecy tenants o'er the glebe," the Wilderness
with well-rolled walks, the grove

Between the upright shafts of whose tall elms
We may discern the thresher at his task.

But, while one of the most rural, urbane Cowper was at the same time one of the least rustic of English poets. He makes no claim to mastery of wide artistic range, concentrating on minute details. He inserts no unnatural figure in his landscape ; every feature is natural and truthful, every line distinguished by his characteristic touch. He knows nothing of " natural magic." His unromantic disposition remained unaffected by the Ossianic vogue. The vague air of mystery, the melancholy pathos of Macpherson's lines, left him indifferent. He had no pleasure in the contemplation of lowering skies and

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melancholy valleys ; he had no knowledge of these emotions delineated by Wordsworth in the poet's progression :

The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion ; the tall rock,
The mountain and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms were then to me
An appetite.

Calmly and pensively he writes after this fashion :

Come, Evening, once again, season of peace ;
Return, sweet Evening, and continue long !
Methinks I see thee in the streaky west,
With matron step slow moving, while the Night
Treads on thy sweeping train ; one hand employed
In letting fall the curtain of repose
On bird and beast, the other charged for man
With sweet oblivion of the cares of day ;
Not sumptuously adorned, nor needing aid,
Like homely-featured Night, of clustering gems ;
A star or two just twinkling on thy brow
Suffices thee ; save that the moon is thine
No less than hers, not worn indeed on high
With ostentatious pageantry, but set
With modest grandeur in thy purple zone,
Resplendent less, but of an ampler round.
Come then, and thou shalt find thy votary calm,
Or make me so. Composure is thy gift :
And whether I devote thy gentler hours
To books, to music, or the poet's toil ;
To weaving nets for bird-alluring fruit ;
Or twining silken threads round ivory reels,
When they command whom man was born to please ;
I slight thee not, but make thee welcome still.

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The pure delight in natural description evidenced in the following lines is characteristic as well of the minor Scottish poets ; but in them there is more of heart-break, more yearning for home scenes tenderly recollected through early association.

Thence with what pleasure have we just discerned
The distant plough slow moving, and beside
His labouring team, that swerved not from the track,
The sturdy swain diminished to a boy.

Here Ouse, slow winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlooked, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut ;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds ;
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear ;
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages remote.
Scenes must be beautiful which, daily viewed,
Please daily, and whose novelty survives
Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years
Praise justly due to those that I describe.

Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid Nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of Ocean on his winding shore,

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And lull the spirit while they fill the mind ;
Unnumbered branches waving in the blast,
And all their leaves fast fluttering, all at once.
Nor less composure waits upon the roar
Of distant floods, or on the softer voice
Of neighbouring fountain, or of rills that slip
Through the cleft rock, and chiming as they fall
Upon loose pebbles, lose themselves at length
In matted grass, that with a livelier green
Betrays the secret of their silent course.
Nature inanimate employs sweet sounds,
But animated nature sweeter still,
To soothe and satisfy the human ear.
Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
The livelong night : nor these alone, whose notes
Nice-fingered art must emulate in vain,
But cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud ;
The jay, the pie, and even the boding owl
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.
Sounds inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
Yet heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
And only there, please highly for their sake.

“ What there is of a religious cast in the volume I have thrown toward the end of it, for two reasons : first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance ; and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many volumes as Lope de Vega or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience.”

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Cowper does not for one moment forget his self-imposed mission, but the satirical pen employed in "The Timepiece" is handled with less bitterness, with less morbidness. The flame of religion no longer burns fiercely. He has not receded one step from his earlier position ; he has not abated one fraction in his hatred of pretence and hypocrisy and injustice ; but time has toned him. He has become more mellow, more human. It is when he detects some tampering with the groundwork of his faith that he scourges indiscriminately the natural philosopher and the astronomer, and speaks in ignorance and censorious petulance. But the frail figure of these lines of pathos and personal appeal speedily obliterates momentary resentment and calls forth ungrudging sympathy :

I was a stricken deer that left the herd
Long since ; with many an arrow deep infixed
My panting side was charged, when I withdrew
To seek a tranquil death in distant shades.
There was I found by One who had Himself
Been hurt by the archers. In His side He bore,
And in His hands and feet, the cruel scars.
With gentle force soliciting the darts,
He drew them forth, and healed and bade me live.
Since then, with few associates, in remote
And silent woods I wander, far from those
My former partners of the peopled scene ;
With few associates, and not wishing more.

We can picture the poet, as evening closes in,
rising at sound of the post-horn and crossing

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to his window shiveringly and peering out on the deserted market square. Barber Wilson's latest scandal retailed, schoolmaster Teedon's newest extravagance laughed over, the fire stirred, the shutters closed, the sofa wheeled round, the "loud hissing urn" throwing up its "steamy columns," he settles to his reading, perhaps to Cook or Forster or Hawkesworth—on which occasions his imagination is so captivated that he seems to partake with the navigators in all the dangers that they encountered. "I lose my anchor," he writes, "my mainsail is rent into shreds: I kill a shark, and by signs converse with a Patagonian, and all this without moving from the fireside." Call not this selfish; what had he to do in the world of activity? Not for him the burden. He picks up his pen idly, and, snug in his philosophy of retirement, permits himself indulgence in this pleasant contemplation.

Hark ! 'tis the twanging horn ! O'er yonder bridge,
That with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the wintry flood, in which the moon
Sees her unwrinkled face reflected bright,
He comes, the herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks,
News from all nations lumbering at his back. . . .

Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
And while the bubbling and loud hissing urn
Throws up a steamy column, and the cups
That cheer but not inebriate, wait on each,

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So let us welcome peaceful evening in.
Not such his evening, who with shining face
Sweats in the crowded theatre, and squeezed
And bored with elbow-points through both his sides,
Outscolds the ranting actor on the stage ;
Nor his, who patient stands till his feet throb,
And his head thumps, to feed upon the breath
Of patriots bursting with heroic rage,
Or placemen all tranquillity and smiles.
This folio of four pages, happy work !
Which not even critics criticize ; that holds
Inquisitive attention, while I read
Fast bound in chains of silence, which the fair,
Though eloquent themselves, yet fear to break ;
What is it but a map of busy life,
Its fluctuations, and its vast concerns ? . . .

'Tis pleasant through the loopholes of retreat
To peep at such a world ; to see the stir
Of the great Babel, and not feel the crowd ;
To hear the roar she sends through all her gates
At a safe distance, where the dying sound
Falls a soft murmur on the uninjured ear.
Thus sitting, and surveying thus at ease
The globe and its concerns, I seem advanced
To some secure and more than mortal height,
That liberates and exempts me from them all.
It turns submitted to my view, turns round
With all its generations ; I behold
The tumult, and am still. The sound of war
Has lost its terrors ere it reaches me ;
Grieves, but alarms me not. I mourn the pride
And avarice that make man a wolf to man,
Hear the faint echo of those brazen throats,
By which he speaks the language of his heart,
And sigh, but never tremble at the sound.

COWPER & HIS POETRY

He travels and expatiates, as the bee
From flower to flower, so he from land to land ;
The manners, customs, policy of all
Pay contribution to the store he gleans ;
He sucks intelligence in every clime,
And spreads the honey of his deep research
At his return, a rich repast for me.
He travels, and I too. I tread his deck,
Ascend his topmast, through his peering eyes
Discover countries, with a kindred heart
Suffer his woes, and share in his escapes ;
While fancy, like the finger of a clock,
Runs the great circuit, and is still at home.

O Winter ! ruler of the inverted year,
Thy scattered hair with sleet like ashes filled,
Thy breath congealed upon thy lips, thy cheeks
Fringed with a beard made white with other snows
Than those of age, thy forehead wrapt in clouds,
A leafless branch thy sceptre, and thy throne
A sliding car, indebted to no wheels,
But urged by storms along its slippery way ;
I love thee, all unlovely as thou seemest,
And dreaded as thou art. Thou holdest the sun
A prisoner in the yet undawning east,
Shortening his journey between morn and noon,
And hurrying him, impatient of his stay,
Down to the rosy west ; but kindly still
Compensating his loss with added hours
Of social converse and instructive ease,
And gathering, at short notice, in one group
The family dispersed and fixing thought,
Not less dispersed by daylight and its cares.
I crown thee King of intimate delights,
Fireside enjoyments, home-born happiness,
And all the comforts that the lowly roof

COWPER & HIS POETRY

Of undisturbed retirement, and the hours
Of long uninterrupted evening know.

“ The Winter Evening ” contains his finest drawings ; but scarcely less excellent is the limning of these lines in the “ Winter Morning Walk ” :

The cattle mourn in corners where the fence
Screens them, and seem half-petrified to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait
Their wonted fodder, not like hungering man,
Fretful if unsupplied, but silent, meek,
And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay,
He from the stack carves out the accustomed load,
Deep-plunging, and again deep-plunging oft,
His broad keen knife into the solid mass ;
Smooth as a wall the upright remnant stands,
With such undeviating and even force
He severs it away : no needless care
Lest storms should overset the leaning pile
Deciduous, or its own unbalanced weight.
Forth goes the woodman, leaving unconcerned
The cheerful haunts of man, to wield the axe
And drive the wedge in yonder forest drear,
From morn to eve his solitary task.
Shaggy, and lean, and shrewd, with pointed ears
And tail cropped short, half lurcher and half cur,
His dog attends him. Close behind his heel
Now creeps he slow ; and now with many a frisk
Wide scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout ;
Then shakes his powdered coat, and barks for joy.
Heedless of all his pranks, the sturdy churl
Moves right toward the mark ; nor stops for aught,
But now and then with pressure of his thumb

COWPER & HIS POETRY

To adjust the fragrant charge of a short tube
That fumes beneath his nose : the trailing cloud
Streams far behind him, scenting all the air.

Humour, pathos, tenderness, Cowper possessed in no small measure ; genuine nature love, an etcher's craft peculiar to himself. But there are moments when his passion for minute detail misleads him—when he descends to trifling doggerel or irregular and undignified prose, and dullness sits heavily. The staccato movement in the apostrophe to the metropolis at the close of the "Garden," for example, becomes intolerable. The lines, filled with commonness of expression, lose all dignity and restraint and become incredibly bald and feeble :

Ambition, avarice, penury incurred
By endless riot, vanity, the lust
Of pleasure and variety, despatch,
As duly as the swallows disappear,
The world of wandering knights and squires
town. . . .

'Tis the cruel gripe
That lean hard-handed Poverty inflicts,
The hope of better things, the chance to win,
The wish to shine, the thirst to be amused,
That at the sound of Winter's hoary wing
Unpeople all our counties of such herds
Of fluttering, loitering, cringing, begging, loose
And wanton vagrants, as make London, vast
And boundless as it is, a crowded coop.

Preposterous too, were it serious, is the celebrated line

The stable yields a stercoraceous heap

COWPER & HIS POETRY

or the already quoted sheepfold pouring out
“its fleecy tenants o’er the glebe.”

But this same dull Cowper, who could not break wholly away from the atmosphere of his century, could withal at times ascend the heights. “Cowper,” writes Christopher North in his thunderous manner, “the same man who was well satisfied to sit day after day beside an elderly lady sewing caps and tippets, except when he was obliged to go and water the flowers or feed the rabbits . . . goes forth in his holy ire like a man inspired and commissioned.”¹

Buoyed on the wings of religious fervour and dowered with prophetic gift, he attains sublimity in this passage :

In the heart

No passion touches a discordant string,
But all is harmony and love. Disease
Is not : the pure and uncontaminate blood
Holds its due course, nor fears the frost of age.
One song employs all nations, and all cry
“Worthy the Lamb, for He was slain for us !”
The dwellers in the vales and on the rocks
Shout to each other, and the mountain-tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy,
Till, nation after nation taught the strain,
Earth rolls the rapturous Hosanna round.
Behold the measure of the promise filled ;
See Salem built, the labour of a God !
Bright as a sun the sacred city shines ;
All kingdoms and all princes of the earth

¹ Essays.

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Flock to that light ; the glory of all lands
Flows into her ; unbounded is her joy,
And endless her increase.

Cowper's verse is not yet wholly liberated from that manner of poetic diction which was presently to bulk so largely in criticism. He still has the teaching of recent masters in mind, and does not disclaim the possibility of resemblance. In the passage just quoted, coloured as it is by faith, and faintly reflecting transcendental light, the Miltonic cadences are seldom absent from his ears. Few people had studied the Puritan poet more, or were more familiar with his poetry than himself.

Then Milton had indeed a poet's charms :
New to my taste, his Paradise surpassed
The struggling efforts of my boyish tongue
To speak its excellence ; I danced for joy.
I marvelled much that, at so ripe an age
As twice seven years, his beauties had then first
Engaged my wonder, and admiring still,
And still admiring, with regret supposed
The joy half lost because not sooner found.¹

But Cowper's verse is stamped with his own peculiar seal ; his " panther quest " was an unadorned simplicity. " The two most renowned writers of history the present day has seen " disgust him always : " Robertson with his pomp and his strut, and Gibbon with his finical and French manners." ² To Unwin he laments that " simplicity is become a very rare

¹ "The Winter Evening," ll. 709-717. ² To Newton, July 27, 1783.

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quality in a writer . . . Swift and Addison were simple ; Pope knew how to be so, but was frequently tinged with affectation : since their day I hardly know a celebrated writer who deserves that character." The achievement of Cowper, although he did not produce a poem of the first rank, was, despite Goldsmith's strictures on the measure, to render blank verse once more possible. Than Milton he sought no better model ; and, after his fashion, he restored to poetry an unadorned simplicity.

VI

THE Task " brought Byron's "coddled poet" fame. Every one read it, quoted from it, made haste to purchase copies. Acquaintances who had ignored his existence for a quarter of a century remembered him suddenly. From Mr. Bacon and Mr. Barham he received "two very flattering letters of thanks" : Mr. Teedon read the volume and, fearful lest the poet should overlook some of them, pointed out all its beauties. Mr. William Churchey, a Welsh attorney, submitted a volume of verses to his judgment ; letters poured in from all quarters—odes, invitations, flatterings. From Newton—whose last expressed perfect satisfaction with the propriety of his proceedings as to the publication, so healing the breach—warm praise gratefully accepted. Lord Dartmouth thanked him for

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the volume "in part read," adding "that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole." A judicious friend in London, who was unknown to Newton, spake him kindly word of eulogy.

Cheerfully might the poet play his battledore and shuttlecock and ring his "thousand bob-majors" on his dumb-bells, gaily now propound his riddles, and the blue-grey eyes lose somewhat of their melancholy and his bag-wig sit complacently. His the right to rub complacent hands. He had won him fame.

His relations bought their copies of "The Task," the lines of which were in everybody's mouth, and asked each other at their tea drinkings whether this was the same melancholy failure they had chosen to forget. For years no word had passed between them and the now famous poet. From Ashley Cowper and the General¹ came his regular allowance—but no further dealings. From time to time reports filtered through to them, little pleasing, barely encouraging, and so the silence remained unbroken. Cowper had lived his life, formed new ties, and followed his own path. Rarely has madness driven poet to poetry; but in his instance "despair made amusement necessary," and he found in verse the most agreeable diversion. Had Cowper not gone mad, he would never have formed acquaintance with the Unwins. Had not Unwin senior met with his fatal accident and John Newton paid his visit

¹ General (late Colonel) Cowper.

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of condolence to the family, we should never have had the "Olney Hymns," and it is unlikely that the poet would ever have found a publisher for the "Satires"—had he ever written them. Had he not happened to look out of his window one dull day and chanced to see Lady Austen, we would never have had "The Task"; and had he not broken with Lady Austen, the poem would probably have remained unfinished and our poetry have been as a consequence vastly the poorer. Had he faced the ordeal of public examination and emerged triumphantly, he might have dozed and prosed away his days among the Lords, and done no more than write love verses to Theodora, and married her in time, and taken the waters at Bath, and been patronized by poor Beau Nash, who cut such a melancholy figure in his abject age, or made up his party to hear Whitefield or the popular preacher supplying the chapel for the day, as was for a time the craze among the fashionable, and attended the routs at Brooks's, and dined and wineed with Chancellor Thurlow, and rubbed shoulders with brilliant Sheridan, and been on terms with Dr. Johnson, and talked history with ponderous Gibbon, and lost more than he could well afford to seductive Charles Fox, and shaken hands with Scotch Smollett, and sniggered over some joke of scandalous Sterne, or chuckled over one of Henry Fielding's broad stories. He might have gamed and diced, and given sentiments and drunk perdition to the Stuarts like a loyal Whig, and trounced the

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watch and developed into a respectable man of fashion with a comfortable bank account and a select dinner list. But the world held no place for Cowper.

Now, however, Lady Hesketh—widowed these three years—read “John Gilpin” and broke a silence uninterrupted since she quitted England with her husband in ’67.¹ She recalled earlier days in Southampton Row, and whispers of love vows to a certain Theodora; she had visions of a genteel young beau, perhaps “Giles Gingerbread,” who

Sometimes said, or tried to say,
A witty thing or two;

she remembered tales of the Westminster Club dinners, of nonsense-mongering and drollery; and, sitting down, dispatched her belated letter. The gap caused in the lonely life by Lady Austen’s departure was filled. A rush of memory overwhelmed the poet, and ardent affection, which neither time nor sorrow had obliterated, revived. Thus he replied in transported mood: “My dear cousin,—It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself: ‘This is just as it should be. We are all grown young

¹ Sir Thomas Hesketh, d. 1782.

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again, and the days that I thought I should see no more are actually returned.' You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you that neither years nor interrupted intercourse have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value—if that can be said to revive which at the most has only been dormant for the want of employment. But I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure ; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again." ¹

Sensible Lady Hesketh, shrewd character-reader with no trace of Lady Austen's butterfly nature, remembering her cousin's circumstances and that these long years of separation were like to have been lean years, made, in her practical manner, tactful and judicious inquiries into the state of the Olney finances. The poet replied frankly. Mrs. Unwin and he had one common purse ; but lately their income had been reduced, and they had been compelled to deny themselves certain trifling luxuries. He

October 12, 1785.

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was unaware that Mrs. Powley¹ had declared that £1800 had been wasted on him! when he wrote to Lady Hesketh: "Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it; but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection." Presently a letter arrived over which the poet made a great fuss—perhaps from Theodora, still cherishing a first love. It was anonymous and puzzled him vastly; but what was important was that it made him "a present of an annuity of £50 a year." Besides, there arrived by the Wellingborough coach "a most elegant writing-desk," a snuff-box with three hares ornamenting, a pocket-book, and a watch-chain. Never had the poet been so deluged with gifts. He penned his letters gaily, but never so gaily as when he wrote to Lady Hesketh. And for the moment no shadow fell across his page.

In November an old schoolfellow, Mr. Bagot—Rector of Blithfield, brother of the bishop complimented in "Tirocinium"—paid a welcome visit and learned of a fresh design. Cowper was engaged in a new translation of Homer, which he had decided to publish by subscription. Bagot subscribed a draft of £20 and promised his whole interest to ensure the success of the

¹ Mrs. Unwin's daughter Susanna. Married Rev. Matthew Powley, May 5, 1774.

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venture. The poet, after hesitation, wrote to Thurlow and Colman—not yet forgiven—and received from the latter “the most affectionate letter imaginable.” To Lady Hesketh he communicated “the great secret”—so great that she “must not whisper it to her cat”;¹ this when “on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the ‘Iliad.’” Chance led to the execution of a design long familiar. The last proof-sheet of “The Task” corrected and packed off to Johnson; “Tirocinium” done with; the “Epistle to Joseph Hill” polished to his satisfaction; time hung heavily, and melancholy settled anew. One day, being “in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable,”² he picked up his “Iliad” listlessly and translated the first dozen lines. Employment was essential; returning to his author again and again, he presently discovered he had filled a considerable number of sheets. The work was pleasant; it provided constant occupation; so he made his decision. For Homer he bore unchanging love. At Westminster he read the “Odyssey” and the “Iliad” with his school-fellow Sutton, and again in the Temple with lazy, forgetful Alston. For Pope as a translator he entertained the heartiest contempt; disgusted to find, when he looked for “the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representation, puerile conceits instead, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position.” So

¹ November 9, 1785.

November 12, 1784.

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to Rowley later.¹ In August 1785 he had a letter in the "Gentleman's Magazine" attacking Pope's translation under the pseudonym "Alethes." He informed Unwin of the scheme² and justified the attempt to Hill.³ To this latter : "Knowing it to have been universally the opinion of the 'literati,' ever since they have allowed themselves to consider the matter coolly, that a translation, properly so called, of Homer is, notwithstanding what Pope has done, a desideratum in the English language, it struck me that an attempt to supply the deficiency would be an honourable one, and having made myself, in former years, somewhat critically a master of the original, I was by this double consideration induced to make the attempt myself." Fuseli, to whom specimens were submitted, reported favourably on the work ; Maty, of the British Museum, adversely hurling the poet into the depths. Colman, who had translated Terence, spoke appreciatively and poured balm on his wounded spirits ; but the venture caused endless heart-breaks. In January 1786 he had finished the "Iliad" ; but finding in it little satisfaction, set about the task of retranslation. Henceforth constant dreary chiselling and polishing. The "Odyssey" he began on September 24, 1788. On September 8, 1790, the manuscript was forwarded to the publisher ; but small thanks had the poet of his toil. Wearily he wrote : "Thus have I been held in constant employment, I know not

¹ February 21, 1788.

² October 22, 1785.

December 24, 1785.

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exactly how many, but I believe these six years, an interval of eight months excepted. It is now become so familiar to me to take Homer from my shelf at a certain hour that I shall, no doubt, continue to take him from my shelf at the same time, even after I have ceased to want him. That period is not far distant. I am now giving the last touches to a work which, had I foreseen the difficulty of it, I should never have meddled with, but which, having at length nearly finished it to my mind, I shall discontinue with regret." ¹ Earlier he had written :

But slighted as it is, and by the great
Abandoned, and, which still I more regret,
Infected with the manners and the modes
It knew not once, the country wins me still.
I never framed a wish, or formed a plan
That flattered me with hopes of earthly bliss,
But there I laid the scene. There early strayed
My fancy, ere yet liberty of choice
Had found me, or the hope of being free.
My very dreams were rural, rural too
The first-born efforts of my youthful muse,
Sportive, and jingling her poetic bells
Ere yet her ear was mistress of their powers.
No bard could please me but whose lyre was tuned
To Nature's praises. Heroes and their feats
Fatigued me, never weary of the pipe
Of Tityrus, assembling as he sang
The rustic throng beneath his favourite beech.²

Now he walked the country while Homer buzzed
in his head, working irreparable mischief to his

¹ May 2, 1790. To Joseph Hill.

² "The Winter Evening," ll. 691-708.

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poetic talents. He ploughed and sowed on the plains of Troy to small purpose.

Cowper advocating the cause of the slaves, voiced the sentiments of the humanitarians; Cowper writing "The Task," gave expression to the creed of the Evangelicals. He himself might express gratification at the reception accorded the two quarto volumes,¹ gleefully pocket the thousand pounds Johnson allowed him, set himself lightly to render the "Batrachomyomachia"; but his translation of Homer supplied no felt want, and, despite his vindication, gave satisfaction to none. A sound critical principle underlay his work. He aimed at faithful rendering of his original, and, by insistence on this, loaded his translation with dull, inharmonious, tasteless lines. When he wrote, "The similitude of Milton's manner to that of Homer is such that no person familiar with both can read either without being reminded of the other; and it is in those breaks and pauses to which the numbers of the English poet are so much indebted, both for their dignity and variety, that he chiefly copies the Grecian," it is evident that he is labouring under a complete misapprehension. His verse, unlike that of Pope, moves slowly. "Between Cowper and Homer," Mr. Arnold says, "there is interposed the mist of Cowper's elaborate Miltonic manner, entirely alien to the flowing rapidity of Homer."² He rarely escapes the trammels of his model, or rises above unforceful medioc-

¹ Published July 1, 1791.

On translating Homer.

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rity ; and despite a certain dignity which he succeeds in imparting, he renders few passages with consummate harmony of expression. His verse imparts a movement entirely alien to Homer ; it has lost his poetic quality, failed to reproduce his poetic essence. He was dissatisfied with the result himself, recognizing that his version was "deficient in the grace of ease" ; but when, in 1793, Mr. Thomas Park presented him with Chapman (whose translation, Coleridge declared, "will give you small use of Homer"), the verdict ran : "I know not whether the book be a rarity, but a curiosity it certainly is. I have as yet seen but little of it—enough, however, to make one wonder that any man with so little taste for Homer or apprehension of his manner should think it worth while to undertake the laborious task of translating him."

But Cowper's denunciation of Chapman matters little, and his own translation is of interest merely to the specialist student of literature. What is of importance from the critical view-point is that, despite Johnson and the tradition of the century, he is here entering a plea for simplicity, directing vigorous assault against artifice in poetic diction, hurling his forces against rhetoric.¹ A thousand pities that this "most interesting man and excellent poet," seduced into belief in his supereminent qualification for the solution of the difficulties of Homeric translation,

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should have saddled himself in these latter years with his burden and numbed finer faculties. This is Cowper at his worst.

Now cast the lot for all—Who wins the chance
Shall yield Achaia service, and himself
Serve also, if successful he escape
This brunt of hostile hardiment severe,
So Nestor. They, inscribing each his lot,
Into the helmet cast it of the son
Of Atreus, Agamemnon. Then the host
Pray'd all, their hands uplifting, and with eyes
To the wide heavens directed, many said.

Excellent enough but un-Homeric the “hostile hardiment.” When Cowper sings of Homeric strut and strife he pants and staggers, incapable of grace and control. But in such a passage as the following, with its slow lingering movement, where the impressiveness of the scene is stamped on the poetic mind, his peculiar qualities find scope for their exercise. Thus the description of Calypso's Isle :

He ended, nor the Argicide refused,
Messenger of the skies ; his sandals fair,
Ambrosial, golden, to his feet he bound,
Which o'er the moist wave, rapid as the wind,
Bear him, and o'er the illimitable earth ;
Then took his rod with which, at will, all eyes
He closes soft or opes them wide again.
So arm'd, forth flew the valiant Argicide.
Alighting on Pieria, down he stoop'd
To Ocean, and the billows lightly skimm'd
In form a sea-mew, such as, in the bays

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Tremendous of the barren Deep her food
Seeking, dips oft in brine her ample wing.
In such disguise o'er many a wave he rode,
But reaching, now, that isle remote, forsook
The azure Deep, and at the spacious grot,
Where dwelt the amber-tressèd nymph, arrived
Found her within. A fire on all the hearth
Blazed sprightly, and, afar-diffused, the scent
Of smooth-split cedar and of cypress-wood
Odorous, burning, cheer'd the happy isle.
She, busied at the loom, and plying fast
Her golden shuttle, with melodious voice
Sat chaunting there ; a grove on either side,
Alder and poplar, and the redolent branch
Widespread of Cypress, skirted dark the cave.
There many a bird of broadest pinion built
Secure her nest, the owl, the kite, and daw
Long-tongued, frequenter of the sandy shores.
A garden-vine luxuriant on all sides,
Mantled the spacious cavern, cluster-hung
Profuse ; four fountains of serenest lymph,
Their sinuous course pursuing side by side,
Stray'd all around, and everywhere appear'd
Meadows of softest verdure, purpled o'er
With violets ; it was a scene to fill
A God from heaven with wonder and delight.
Hermes, Heaven's messenger, admiring stood
That sight, and having all survey'd, at length
Enter'd the grotto ; nor the lovely nymph
Him knew not soon as seen, for not unknown
Each to the other the Immortals are,
How far soever separate their abodes.
Yet found he not within the mighty Chief,
Ulysses ; he sat weeping on the shore,
Forlorn—for there his custom was with groans

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Of sad regret to afflict his breaking heart,
Looking continual o'er the barren Deep.

Meanwhile the poet took snuff with Mrs. Unwin from their silver box ; wrote his letters at his card-table, pounce-box ready at hand ; had his interests in the town ; made new friends ; and had a kindly eye for their weaknesses as well as his own. Presently there was a flutter of excitement at Orchard Side ; Lady Hesketh had promised a visit. On February 9, 1788, the middle-aged poet wrote in ecstasies : “ And now, my dear ” (what infinite pleasure this correspondence gave our poet ! how bright those letters to her ladyship !), “ let me tell you once more that your kindness in promising us a visit has charmed us both. I shall see you again. I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together (pleasant enough these walks to Weston but lonely at times). I will show you my prospects, the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks, everything that I have described. I anticipate the pleasure of those days not very far distant, and feel a part of it at this moment.” The vicarage was to be her ladyship’s lodging ; she arrived with her suite and, after separation of a quarter of a century, the cousins met again. Quietly her ladyship took stock ; she studied Mrs. Unwin, and wrote thus to Theodora : “ She is very far from grave ; on the contrary, she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little Puritanical words which fall from her *de temps*

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en temps she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety—great, indeed, must it have been not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong, but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has in the most liberal sense of those words no will or shadow of inclination but what is *his*. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory ; but when you consider that I began to write at the moment and at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character develops itself by degrees ; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks of a grave subject, she does express herself with a Puritanical tone and in Puritanical expressions, but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth ; and indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all that she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets, as appears by several little quotations which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way. There is something truly affectionate and sincere in her manner. No one can express more heartily

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than she does her joy to have me at Olney ; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him."

The poet rode in her ladyship's carriage, in green and buff, with, doubtless, dog Mungo—immediate predecessor of immortal dog Beau—by his side. Her ladyship and Mrs. Unwin went about among the Olney poor ; and in the evenings, while his letters were being written and his Homeric verses polished, the ladies knitted and gossiped and Lady Hesketh came to appreciate Mrs. Unwin more and more, and mutual affection grew. She talked sensibly to the poet on the subject of his obsession, and anxious Mrs. Unwin saw him led into a tranquilliser frame of mind. Presently the Olney tongues began to wag ; gossips carried tales to London and honest Newton learned astounding news. Respected Cowper has turned *debauché*—Papist. Down he sat without reflection and penned a rash letter to the backslider. Cowper replied with bitter words ; rendered an account of his doings, justifying himself. Rash Newton reflected ; remembering the Olney folk, he attempted to sift the evidence, and, finding it worthless, admitted error and the surface settled once more.

But while Lady Hesketh expressed satisfaction with everything she found in Olney, on one thing she was determined : the poet, with his income increased now by a clear £100, must quit the dull Olney house and find him pleasanter quarters ; he must have cheerful

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society, and longer walks than his thirty yards of gravel permit. A vacant house at Weston Underwood, the property of the Throckmortons, was taken, and July 3, he announced the expected removal to Unwin, anticipating the pleasure that proximity to the Throckmortons would confer. Lady Hesketh had convinced him that the house was insanitary, that the air of Olney was insalubrious. "Here we have no neighbourhood, there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds in which we can always ramble, and shall not walk through almost impassable dirt to get at them."

To Bagot and to Newton he wrote severely of Olney, ascribing his maladies to the "atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours" issuing "from flooded meadows," and to a cellar waterlogged for months.

The presence of Lady Hesketh, the society of the Throckmortons, his translation, distracted him; he was composed and gay; but the shadow lay across his path. Once, before her ladyship visited Olney, he wrote: "I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore, and I prepared to

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sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed ; these hopes have been blasted ; these comforts have been wrested from me." In November 1786 the poet and his companion were settled in Weston, and it was not without regret that they left the poor dreary barracks at Orchard Side after nineteen years.

Despite the departure of Lady Hesketh, they were for the moment happy enough ; but while visitors came and went and Homer progressed, a terrible blow was pending. Unwin, excellent, amiable, genuine Unwin, loving son, sincere friend, travelling in the West with Henry Thornton, was stricken with typhus at Winchester ; and scarcely was the news received when the melancholy tidings arrived that he had passed away.¹ To the sorely tried couple in their sorrow came kindly William Bull ; and, the first transport of sorrow past, they fought their battle nobly. New friends were constantly made, many of them of the truest—Young Higgins, for example, who did some drawings for the poet's study and was a great admirer of his work. On January 18, 1787, came on his first visit Samuel Rose, son of the Chiswick schoolmaster, on his way from London to Glasgow University, bearing the "thanks of some of the Scotch professors" for Cowper's two volumes. He it was, invaluable transcriber of Homer, who, coming six miles out of his way to visit the poet, introduced him to the poetry of Burns. Later² Clotworthy Rowley, his old

¹ November 29, 1786.

² December 1787.

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fellow Templar, "one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world," renewed acquaintance from Dublin; Thurlow and the poet exchanged letters on the subject of the translation of Homer; James Hurdis, author of the "Village Curate," corresponded amiably with him, as did Thomas Park, author of "Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems," Carwardine, and William Hayley.

But even as young Rose was presenting his credentials the poet was at grips with his deadliest foe. The "little nervous feeling" he had lately experienced developed ominously: Homer progressed slowly: before the month¹ was out the enemy had him by the throat, and for six months there was the silence and blackness of death. He again attempted suicide by hanging, refused to see a human face except Mrs. Unwin's, was morose and unmanageable. Then the cloud lifted with startling suddenness; he renewed his interrupted correspondence with Lady Hesketh; acknowledged the "Lounger," and announced August 30: "My health and spirits seem to be mending daily: . . . I use exercise and take the air in the park and wilderness: I read much but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own." Their

¹ January 1787.

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kindness was without bounds. Cowper, vastly in their debt, repaid them after a poet's fashion, with verses.

In November of this year ¹ a new honour was conferred on the poet. The clerk of All Saints, Northampton, walked to Weston to implore the assistance of his muse in writing the verses annexed to the bill of mortality for the parish, published at Christmas. Cowper suggested, "There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox the statuary, who, everybody knows, is a first-rate maker of verse. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose." "Alas!" was the reply, "I have heretofore borrowed help from him; but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him." This flattery the poet could not resist; he accepted office and performed his onerous duties during several years.

The promised visit of Lady Hesketh in the spring of 1788 was unavoidably postponed; but in July he had Newton with him, and to the company was presently added Rose, who transcribed the twelfth book of the "Iliad." October found him once more at Weston in company with Lady Hesketh.² In January 1790 the poet formed a new acquaintance. At Weston arrived a relative—"a sweet lad, but as shy as a bird"—Mr. John Johnson,³ with a volume of poems in manuscript, which he read to the poet. Johnson, then at Caius College studying

¹ 1787.

² V. Rose's letter dated October 25, 1788.

³ Son of Catharine Donne, the poet's cousin.

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with a view to taking Orders—a lively enough, scatter-brained, fiddle-playing young fellow, had some copying set him—part of the “Odyssey,” which he had never read, and formed an enduring friendship. To the spring of this year possibly belong those beautiful lines to Mrs. Unwin : ¹

Mary ! I want a lyre with other strings,
Such aid from Heaven as some have feigned they
drew,

An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things,
That, ere through age or woe I shed my wings,

I may record thy worth with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,
And that immortalizes whom it sings.

But thou hast little need. There is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look,

A chronicle of actions just and bright :
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And, since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee
mine.

Toward the end of February he received Mrs. Bodham's gift of the miniature of his mother, and by March 12 his heart-moving lines were composed ; finished “not without tears.”

To this period belong many of his finest short pieces ; and when the Laureateship was fallen vacant, Lady Hesketh approached her kinsman with a view to submitting his name as a candi-

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date for the office. But the poet took fright at the bare suggestion; the mere thought of publicity, of kissing hands at Court. "I thank thee for the offer of thy best services on this occasion. But Heaven guard my brows from the wreath you mention, whatever wreath beside may hereafter adorn them! It would be a leaden extinguisher clapped on all the fire of my genius, and I should never more produce a line worth reading. To speak seriously, it would make me miserable, and therefore I am sure that thou, of all my friends, wouldst least wish me to wear it." Hayley, of whom we shall presently further hear, likewise declined the office, which was in the end accepted by Pye.

Among the pieces of lighter texture belonging to this period are the five slave ballads,¹ which the poet, remembering he had already "borne his testimony" in favour of his black brethren, produced after much hesitation; the poem "On the Queen's Visit to London";² "The Dog and the Water-Lily," immortalizing dog Beau; and several reviews. As a writer of light verse Cowper is the very perfection of natural grace and neatness. Line follows line, clause succeeds clause, verse connects verse, with unmatched facility and perfection of witty phrasing. Nothing could appear more simple than his excellent fables with their irreproachable moral, or the lines which a hundred-and-one trifling incidents call forth. Now a halibut sets the rhymes jingling through his brain;

¹ Spring 1788.

March 17, 1789.

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now a mischievous bull occasions half a dozen stanzas ; now a viper killed in his garden inspires twenty couplets written in excellent spirits ; now the receipt of a patchwork quilt from Mrs. King is gracefully acknowledged ; now a compliment to Mrs. Throckmorton facilely penned ; now to a cat, shut up accidentally in a drawer by Susan Wheeler, we owe thanks for a droll thing typically Cowper's with a sound moral attached. " The Flattening-Mill " illustrates this extraordinary metrical aptness :

When a bar of pure silver or ingot of gold
Is sent to be flatted or wrought into length,
It is passed between cylinders often, and rolled
In an engine of utmost mechanical strength.

Thus tortured and squeezed, at last it appears
Like a loose heap of ribbon, a glittering show,
Like music it tinkles and rings in your ears,
And warmed by the pressure, is all in a glow.

This process achieved, it is doomed to sustain
The thump after thump of a gold-beater's mallet,
And at last is of service in sickness or pain
To cover a pill for a delicate palate.

Alas for the poet ! who dares undertake
To urge reformation of national ill——
His head and his heart are both likely to ache
With the double employment of mallet and mill.

If he wish to instruct, he must learn to delight ;
Smooth, ductile, and even, his fancy must flow,
Must tinkle and glitter like gold to the sight,
And catch in its progress a sensible glow.

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After all, he must beat it as thin and as fine
As the leaf that enfolds what an invalid swallows ;
For truth is unwelcome, however divine,
And unless you adorn it, a nausea follows.

But in other work he sounds a deeper note. These lines "To the Nightingale," filled with sad suggestion, are in advance of his age ; they ring out in complete emancipation and touch high poetry. Cowper enters here unfamiliar poetical territory with fuller understanding ; it is as if he had learned in advance from Wordsworth.

Whence is it, that amazed I hear
From yonder withered spray,
The foremost morn of all the year,
The melody of May ?

And why, since thousands would be proud
Of such a favour shown,
Am I selected from the crowd,
To witness it alone ?

Sing'st thou, sweet Philomel, to me,
For that I also long
Have practised in the groves like thee,
Though not like thee, in song ?

Or sing'st thou rather, under force
Of some divine command,
Commissioned to presage a course
Of happier days at hand ?

Thrice welcome then ! for many a long
And joyless year have I,
As thou to-day, put forth my song
Beneath a wintry sky.

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But thee no wintry skies can harm,
Who only need'st to sing,
To make even January charm,
And every season Spring.

Unfamiliar too is the Byronic note sounded
in "The Shrubbery" :

O ! Happy Shades ! to me unblest !
Friendly to peace, but not to me !
How ill the scene that offers rest,
And heart that cannot rest, agree ! . . .

Me fruitful scenes and prospects waste
Alike admonish not to roam ;
These tell me of enjoyments past,
And those of sorrows yet to come.

His art of phrase-turning never failed. Perfect too after its fashion is "The Needless Alarm," the lines on the "Solitude of Alexander Selkirk," despite Wordsworth's carping at the "church-going bell," or the nobly phrased "Boadicea" with its vibrant note of passion.

BOADICEA : AN ODE

When the British warrior queen,
Bleeding from the Roman rods,
Sought, with an indignant mien,
Counsel of her country's gods,

Sage beneath a spreading oak
Sat the Druid, hoary chief,
Every burning word he spoke
Full of rage and full of grief.

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Princess ! if our aged eyes
Weep upon thy matchless wrongs,
'Tis because resentment ties
All the terrors of our tongues.

Rome shall perish,—write that word
In the blood that she has spilt ;
Perish hopeless and abhorred,
Deep in ruin as in guilt.

Rome for empire far renowned,
Tramples on a thousand states ;
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground,
Hark ! the Gaul is at her gates.

Other Romans shall arise,
Heedless of a soldier's name,
Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,
Harmony the path to fame.

Then the progeny that springs
From the forests of our land,
Armed with thunder, clad with wings,
Shall a wider world command.

Regions Cæsar never knew
Thy posterity shall sway,
Where his eagles never flew,
None invincible as they.

Such the bard's prophetic words
Pregnant with celestial fire,
Bending as he swept the chords
Of his sweet but awful lyre.

She, with all a monarch's pride,
Felt them in her bosom glow ;
Rushed to battle, fought and died,
Dying, hurled them at the foe.

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Ruffians, pitiless as proud,
Heaven awards the vengeance due ;
Empire is on us bestowed ;
Shame and ruin wait for you.

In one of these occasional pieces ("The Cast-away") the tragedy of a life stands revealed, closing in sorrow and infinite despair.

Homer in the publisher's hands, the poet grew restless. Lady Hesketh proposed that he should write on the "Mediterranean," which fortunately, pleading ignorance, he declined. The Reverend John Buchanan, his Weston neighbour, suggested the "Four Ages of Man." Cowper heard his ideas on the subject, grew enthusiastic as was his fashion, wrote thirty-eight lines without design, and then abandoned the attempt.¹ Suggestions poured in but the original fount had failed. "Yardley Oak" attained, in detached lines, dignity and eloquence ; but Cowper lacked the imaginative quality requisite for the elevated treatment of his theme. Yet this blank verse is the highest expression of his technique.

Thought cannot spend itself, comparing still
The great and little of thy lot, thy growth
From almost nullity into a state
Of matchless grandeur, and declension thence,
Slow, into such magnificent decay.
Time was when, settling on thy leaf, a fly
Could shake thee to the root—and time had been
When tempests could not . . .

May 1791.

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Thine arms have left thee. Winds have rent them
off

Long since, and rovers of the forest wild
With bow and shaft have burnt them. Some have
left

A splintered stump, bleached to a snowy white :
And some memorial none, where once they grew.
Yet life still lingers in thee, and puts forth
Proof not contemptible of what she can,
Even where death predominates. The Spring
Finds thee not less alive to her sweet force
Than yonder upstarts of the neighbouring wood,
So much thy juniors, who their birth received
Half a millennium since the date of thine. . . .

Other work Cowper has left us, translations of the eighth book of the "Æneid," of Ovid, of Horace. Such toil he found congenial ; Horace stimulated him and called forth his best faculty of polished phrase-making. Nowhere does he lack grace and urbanity ; and he has still to give us two immortal pieces, moved by sorrow and despair. But already he is descending into the vale, man of faith and infinite sorrow. A few more years in the shadow and the weary spirit shall be at rest.

VII

I AM glad you love Cowper," wrote old-world Charles Lamb to Coleridge. "I could forgive a man for not enjoying Milton, but I would not call that man my

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friend who should be offended with the divine chit-chat of Cowper." Southey's pronouncement, supported by Alexander Smith—"the best letter-writer in the English language"—has never been seriously challenged. Let the Dean pen his *chronique intime*, humorous and cynical, to Stella; Pope, whom our poet called a disgusting letter-writer, his budget with a view to public reading; Gray, his descriptions, splendid, sarcastic, and amusing; Horace Walpole lead us through his "brilliant, jigging, smirking Vanity Fair"; Lady Mary Montagu observe foreign manners and retail her fashionable gossip, not mealy mouthed; Chesterfield, with cold grace, inculcate intimately his ethical code on poor Philip Stanhope: not one of these is so utterly lacking in self-consciousness, so unaffected, so tender, so artless, so urbane, so droll, so naturally vivacious, so genuinely sad, as Cowper. Not for one moment did he dream that the accounts he penned of a thousand-and-one trifling happenings, from the receipt of a pot of scallops or the delinquencies of Mr. Morley in the matter of dispatching groceries, to an attack of toothache when dining with the Throckmortons, or the taking of soluble tartar in proper doses for indigestion, would outlast momentary interest, or that the confessions of a soul in agony would be read by other eyes than those for which they were immediately intended; not for one moment did he imagine he was penning a record that would render his personality as familiar to posterity

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as that of a most intimate friend. Not for one moment did he dream that with every line he wrote he was adding another touch to a portrait that will long survive when the last dim colour is faded from the canvases of Romney and Lawrence and Abbot. His horizon is limited and his range of vision narrow. His correspondents are men and women who, for the most part, made no figure in the great world—simple godly people whose very names, but for his association, would have been long since effaced on their mouldered tombstones. But interest attaches to the most trivial incident he chose to chronicle. He writes with distant dignity to a stranger, with droll humour to a friend, or in the sadness of a fixed despair, unfolding gradually his story. Poor distressful Cowper! with your twenty books and your Homer, your silver shoe-buckles and your green coat and yellow waistcoat, your periwig about which you wrote so amusedly, and your “gentleish toothpick case” for which you did not begrudge half a guinea—dull enough your quiet, sad life! When you talk nonsense it is clever nonsense which charms us unfailingly; when you are introspective and censorious we turn a deaf ear, remembering our own faults. There is endless pleasure in your society for those of us who steal away to these quiet places rarely.

Early he writes these jingling lines to Robert Lloyd¹ with ominous ring:

¹ Robert Lloyd, 1733-1764.

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'Tis not that I design to rob
Thee of thy birthright, gentle Bob,
For thou art born sole heir and single
Of dear Mat Prior's easy jingle ;
Not that I mean, while thus I knit
My threadbare sentiments together,
To show my genius or my wit,
When God and you know I have neither ;
Or such, as might be better shown
By letting poetry alone.

'Tis not with either of these views,
That I presume to address the Muse :
But to divert a fierce banditti
(Sworn foes to everything that's witty),
That, with a black infernal train,
Make cruel inroads on my brain,
And daily threaten to drive thence
My little garrison of sense :
The fierce banditti which I mean,
Are gloomy thoughts led on by Spleen. . . .¹

When the House of Lords affair occurred, Cowper's fortunes tumbled about his ears and his friends were swept away. But one remained, solid Joseph Hill, and to him from his Huntingdon refuge the poet thus wrote of new acquaintances :

" Oct. 25, 1765.

" Dear Joe,—I am afraid the month of October has proved rather unfavourable to the *belle assemblée* at Southampton, high winds and continual rains being bitter enemies to that agreeable lounge, which you and I are equally fond of. I have very cordially betaken

¹ 1754. The earliest known letter is dated Durham, November 11, 1753.

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myself to my books and my fireside, and seldom leave them unless for exercise. I have added another family to the number of those I was acquainted with when you were here. Their name is Unwin—the most agreeable people imaginable ; quite sociable, and as free from the ceremonious civility of country gentlefolks as any I have ever met with. They treat me more like a near relation than a stranger, and their house is always open to me. The old gentleman carries me to Cambridge in his chaise. He is a man of learning and good sense, and as simple as Parson Adams. His wife has a very uncommon understanding, has read much to excellent purpose, and is more polite than a duchess. The son, who belongs to Cambridge, is a most amiable young man, and the daughter quite of a piece with the rest of the family. They see but little company, which suits me exactly ; go when I will, I find a house full of peace and cordiality in all its parts, and I am sure to hear no scandal, but such discourse instead of it as we are all better for. You remember Rousseau's description of an English morning ; such are the mornings I spend with these good people ; and the evenings differ from them in nothing, except that they are still more snug and quieter. Now I know them, I wonder that I liked Huntingdon so well before I knew them, and am apt to think I should find every place disagreeable that had not an Unwin belonging to it.

“ This incident convinces me of the truth of

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an observation I have often made, that when we circumscribe our estimate of all that is clever within the limits of our own acquaintance (which I at least have been always apt to do) we are guilty of a very uncharitable censure upon the rest of the world, and of a narrowness of thinking disgraceful to ourselves. Wapping and Redriff may contain some of the most amiable persons living, and such as one would go to Wapping and Redriff to make acquaintance with. You remember Mr. Gray's stanza :

“ Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear ;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

“ Yours, dear Joe,
“ W. C.”

The following letter is an excellent piece of literary criticism ; for Cowper is no mean critic. He had broken with artifice in his own poetry, although numbering himself “ among the warmest admirers of Mr. Pope as an original poet ” ; and when the Dictator, with the Augustan pentameters sounding in his ears, hastily condemned the immortal cadences of “ Paradise Lost,” “ anticipating the expressions of a century to come,” he wrote indignantly to Unwin in defence of his master.

“ Oct. 31, 1779.

“ My dear Friend,—I wrote my last letter merely to inform you that I had nothing to say ;

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in answer to which you have said nothing. I admire the propriety of your conduct, though I am a loser by it. I will endeavour to say something now, and shall hope for something on return.

“ I have been well entertained with Johnson’s biography, for which I thank you ; with one exception, and that a swingeing one, I think he has acquitted himself with his usual good sense and sufficiency. His treatment of Milton is unmerciful to the last degree. A pensioner is not likely to spare a republican ; and the Doctor, in order, I suppose, to convince his royal patron of the sincerity of his monarchical principles, has belaboured that great poet’s character with the most industrious cruelty. As a man, he has hardly left him the shadow of one good quality. Churlishness in his private life and a rancorous hatred of everything royal in his public are the two colours with which he has smeared all the canvas. If he had any virtues, they are not to be found in the Doctor’s picture of him ; and it is well for Milton that some sourness in his temper is the only vice with which his memory has been charged ; it is evident enough that if his biographer could have discovered more, he would not have spared him. As a poet, he has treated him with severity enough, and has plucked one or two of the most beautiful feathers out of his Muse’s wing and trampled them under his great foot. He has passed sentence of condemnation upon Lycidas, and has taken occasion, from that

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charming poem, to expose to ridicule (which is indeed ridiculous enough) the childish prattlement of pastoral compositions, as if *Lycidas* was the prototype and pattern of them all. The liveliness of the description, the sweetness of the numbers, the classical spirit of antiquity that prevails in it, go for nothing. I am convinced, by the way, that he has no ear for poetical numbers, or that it was stopped by prejudice against the harmony of Milton's. Was there ever anything so delightful as the music of the 'Paradise Lost'? It is like that of a fine organ; has the fullest and the deepest tones of majesty, with all the softness and elegance of the Dorian flute. Variety without end and never equalled, unless perhaps by Virgil. Yet the Doctor has little or nothing to say upon this copious theme, but talks something about the unfitness of the English language for blank verse, and how apt it is, in the mouth of some readers, to degenerate into declamation. Oh! I could thresh his old jacket till I made his pension jingle in his pocket.

"I could talk a good while longer, but I have no room. Our love attends you.

"Yours affectionately,
"W. C."

To the Rev. John Newton, recipient of some of his saddest pages, the poet when in spirits wrote in happiest vein. In June 1784 he had a charming paper on his hares in the "Gentleman's Magazine" which has been read by all

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the world. But had there been an unfortunate termination to the following trivial incident, so vividly described, it might never have been written.

“August 21, 1780.

“The following occurrence ought not to be passed over in silence in a place where so few notable ones are to be met with. Last Wednesday night, while we were at supper, between the hours of eight and nine, I heard an unusual noise in the back parlour, as if one of the hares was entangled and endeavouring to disengage herself. I was just going to rise from table when it ceased. In about five minutes a voice on the outside of the parlour door inquired if one of my hares had got away. I immediately rushed into the next room and found that my poor favourite Puss had made her escape. She had gnawed in sunder the strings of a lattice-work with which I thought I had sufficiently secured the window, and which I preferred to any other sort of blind because it admitted plenty of air. From thence I hastened to the kitchen, where I saw the redoubtable Thomas Freeman, who told me, that having seen her just after she had dropped into the street, he attempted to cover her with his hat, but she screamed out and leaped directly over his head. I then desired him to pursue as fast as possible, and added Richard Coleman to the chase, as being nimbler and carrying less weight than Thomas; not expecting to see her again, but

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desirous to learn, if possible, what became of her. In something less than an hour Richard returned, almost breathless, with the following account : That soon after he began to run, he left Tom behind him, and came in sight of a most numerous hunt of men, women, children, and dogs ; that he did his best to keep back the dogs, and presently outstripped the crowd, so that the race was at last disputed between himself and Puss. She ran right through the town and down the lane that leads to Dropshort ; a little before she came to the house he got the start and turned her ; she pushed for the town again, and soon after she entered it, sought shelter in Mr. Wagstaff's tanyard, adjoining to old Mr. Drake's. Sturges's harvest men were at supper, and saw her from the opposite side of the way. There she encountered the tan-pits full of water ; and while she was struggling out of one pit, and plunging into another, and almost drowned, one of the men drew her out by the ears and secured her. She was then well washed in a bucket to get the lime out of her coat, and brought home in a sack at ten o'clock.

“ The frolic cost us four shillings, but you may believe we did not grudge a farthing of it. The poor creature received only a little hurt in one of her claws, and in one of her ears, and is now almost as well as ever.

“ I do not call this an answer to your letter, but such as it is I send it, presuming upon that interest which I know you take in my minutest concerns, which I cannot express

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better than in the words of Terence a little varied—*Nihil mei a te alienum putas.*

“Yours, my dear friend,

“W. C.”

The spirit of lawlessness stalking abroad, the quiet of Olney was rudely disturbed. There were threats of incendiarism in the air ; people went to bed apprehensively ; and Mrs. Unwin's nerves were jangled and out of order. As for himself, Cowper wrote stoutly, he was “impregnable to all such assaults.” There was a side to the Olney character with which Newton was familiar to his cost ; and the following unlovely picture is drawn of the consequences of a minor conflagration that alarmed the town : “London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Everything was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected ; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down before he could wrest it from her.”¹ On November 17 he described the sequel, in excellent spirits and with keen appreciation of the ludicrous nature of the scene ; an account of his former parishioners which Newton must have read with amusement and disgust : “Since our conflagration here we have sent two women and a boy to the justice for depredation ; Sue Riviss for stealing a piece

¹ To Newton, November 3, 1783.

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of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you will remember, escaped for want of evidence ; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol had Billy Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it ; but he good-naturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some ironwork, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipt, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stonehouse to the high arch and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable Hinschcomb, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the

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too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to still harder ; and this double flogging continued till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession and, placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club and, pulling him backwards by the same, slapt his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing."

While dynasties tottered and republics struggled painfully to birth and the poet attended on Fame, Pitt became Premier, and William Grenville, his supporter, came down to Olney to solicit the votes of the honourable electors. Among others whom he canvassed was Whig Cowper, who, drawn for the moment into the political arena, had excellent opportunity for studying the plausible methods of certain parliamentary candidates. Mr. Grenville he found gentlemanly enough, although of the opposite side in politics ; but he knew also the exact value of that fervid hand-clasp, and chuckled amusedly when Lady Austen offered her cheek to my gentleman as if to the manner born, and

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Mrs. Unwin submitted demurely to the salute, and the maid blushing, before the grinning crowd at their champion's heels. There were regrettable incidents connected with this election : Mr. Throckmorton, canvassing for Lord Verney, the Foxite, was insulted by "wrong-headed" Nathan Sample, who had "much the same aversion to a Papist that some people have to a cat : rather an antipathy than a reasonable dislike" ; and, before the contest was finished there were assaults on the Sheriff, the lawyers and the voters, and window-smashings and broken pates enough to keep the court busy for a week. This is the humorous, skilful old-world sketch from the poet's pencil : ¹

" March 29, 1784.

" My Dear Friend,—It being his Majesty's pleasure that I should yet have another opportunity to write before he dissolves the parliament, I avail myself of it with all possible alacrity. I thank you for your last, which was not the less welcome for coming, like an extraordinary gazette, at a time when it was not expected.

" As when the sea is uncommonly agitated, the water finds its way into creeks and holes of rocks which in its calmer state it never reaches, in like manner the effect of these turbulent times is felt even at Orchard Side, where in general we live as undisturbed by the political element as shrimps or cockles that have been accidentally

¹ To Newton.

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deposited in some hollow beyond the water-mark by the usual dashing of the waves. We were sitting yesterday after dinner, the two ladies and myself, very composedly, and without the least apprehension of any such intrusion in our snug parlour, one lady knitting, the other netting, and the gentleman winding worsted, when to our unspeakable surprise a mob appeared before the window ; a smart rap was heard at the door, the boys halloo'd, and the maid announced Mr. Grenville. Puss was, unfortunately, let out of her box, so that the candidate, with all his good friends at his heels, was refused admittance at the grand entry and referred to the back door as the only possible way of approach.

“Candidates are creatures not very susceptible of affronts, and would rather, I suppose, climb in at a window than be absolutely excluded. In a minute the yard, the kitchen, and the parlour were filled. Mr. Grenville, advancing toward me, shook me by the hand with a degree of cordiality that was extremely seducing. As soon as he and as many more as could find chairs were seated, he began to open the intent of his visit. I told him I had no vote, for which he readily gave me credit. I assured him I had no influence, which he was not equally inclined to believe, and the less, no doubt, because Mr. Ashburner, the draper, addressing himself to me at this moment, informed me that I had a great deal. Supposing that I could not be possessed of such a treasure without knowing

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it, I ventured to confirm my first assertion by saying that if I had any I was utterly at a loss to imagine where it could be or wherein it consisted. Thus ended the conference. Mr. Grenville squeezed me by the hand again, kissed the ladies, and withdrew. He kissed likewise the maid in the kitchen, and seemed upon the whole a most loving, kissing, kind-hearted gentleman. He is very young, genteel, and handsome. He has a pair of very good eyes in his head, which, not being sufficient, as it should seem, for the many nice and difficult purposes of a senator, he has a third also, which he wore suspended by a riband from his button-hole. The boys halloo'd, the dogs barked, Puss scampered, the hero, with his long train of obsequious followers, withdrew. We made ourselves very merry with the adventure, and in a short time settled into our former tranquillity—never, probably, to be thus interrupted more. I thought myself, however, happy in being able to affirm truly that I had not that influence for which he sued, and which, had I been possessed of it, with my present views of the dispute between the Crown and the Commons, I must have refused him, for he is on the side of the former. It is comfortable to be of no consequence in a world where one cannot exercise any without disoblighing somebody. The town, however, seems to be much at his service, and if he be equally successful throughout the country he will undoubtedly gain his election. Mr. Ashburner,

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perhaps, was a little mortified, because it was evident that I owed the honour of this visit to his misrepresentation of my importance. But had he thought proper to assure Mr. Grenville that I had three heads, I should not, I suppose, have been bound to produce them.

“Mr. Scott, who you say was so much admired in your pulpit, would be equally admired in his own, at least by all capable judges, were he not so apt to be angry with his congregation. This hurts him, and had he the understanding and eloquence of Paul himself, would still hurt him. He seldom, hardly ever indeed, preaches a gentle, well-tempered sermon, but I hear it highly commended; but warmth of temper, indulged to a degree that may be called scolding, defeats the end of preaching. It is a misapplication of his powers, while it also cripples and teases away his hearers. But he is a good man, and may perhaps outgrow it.

“Many thanks for the worsted, which is excellent. We are as well as a spring hardly less severe than the severest winter will give us leave to be. With our united love, we conclude ourselves yours and Mrs. Newton’s affectionate and faithful

“W. C.

“M. U.”

To Hill Cowper wrote on December 7, 1782 :
“How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine!—yours, spent amid the

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ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs ; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it ; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement." He heard at one time that the Peace of Gibraltar was abandoned, and again, that it was to be still continued ; rumours contradictory, but he had little curiosity and was no politician. He read his newspaper discussions on the American war, but felt himself more interested in the success of his early cucumbers than in any part of that great and important subject. The loss of America he regarded as the ruin of England, yet later he described that continent as " thirteen pitiful colonies." When Fox quoted his famous apostrophe to the Bastille in the House, it gave the poet vast pleasure :

Ye horrid towers, the abode of broken hearts,
Ye dungeons, and ye cages of despair,
That monarchs have supplied from age to age
With music such as suits their sovereign ears,
The sighs and groans of miserable men !
There's not an English heart that would not leap
To hear that ye were fallen at last ; to know
That even our enemies, so oft employed
In forging chains for us, themselves were free.

But he noted with dismay the excesses of the Revolution. " The French, who, like all lively folks, are extreme in everything, are such in their zeal for freedom ; and if it were possible to make so noble a cause ridiculous, their

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manner of promoting it could not fail to do so. Princes and peers reduced to plain gentlemanship, and gentles reduced to a level with their own lackeys, are excesses of which they will repent hereafter. Differences of rank and subordination are, I believe, of God's appointment, and consequently essential to the well-being of society ; but what we mean by fanaticism in religion is exactly that which animates their politics, and unless time should sober them, they will, after all, be an unhappy people." ¹ When, however, the Republic was definitely established, Cowper, staunch to his principles of liberty and religious equality, insisted that every nation must work out its own salvation. "All nations have a right to choose their own form of government, and the sovereignty of the people is a doctrine that evinces itself ; for whenever the people choose to be masters, they always are so, and none can hinder them. God grant that we may have no revolution here, but unless we have reform we certainly shall. . . . The hour has come when power founded on patronage and corrupt majorities must govern this land no longer. Concessions, too, must be made to Dissenters of every denomination. They have a right to them—a right to all the privileges of Englishmen, and, sooner or later, by fair means or by foul, they will have them." Cowper's political counsel was unheard in the world. He believed in progress, in liberty of religious worship, in

¹ To Lady Hesketh, July 7, 1790.

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the possibility of the redemption of humanity, and his religion colours his whole attitude. But, primarily, his concern was with the welfare of the soul.

When black melancholy gripped him, and the Olney fogs locked him within his four walls ; when the mists settled heavily on the meadows, and the muck-heaps scattered and hurled their dust down his throat as oft as he ventured into the street ; when the winds swirled and hooted in his crazy chimneys and the bitter frosts froze the fens ; when everything, peer where he might through his dull pane, seemed grown abominable—the poet, introspective and moody, tormented himself with the memory of his dream. When the haunting obsession entered the house and sat at board with him, he penned gloomy lines in his darkened parlour.

“ It is an alleviation of the woes even to an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come when it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. . . . The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes everything, and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that

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this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it ; but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again ; but a soul once slain lives no more.”¹ Melancholy enough all this ; but hardly less so these lines, written on the eve of his fourth derangement :

“ To Lady Hesketh.

“ The Lodge,

“ Jan. 18, 1787.

“ I have been much indisposed with the fever that I told you had seized me ; my nights during the whole week may be said to have been almost sleepless. The consequence has been that, except the translation of about thirty lines at the conclusion of the thirteenth book, I have been forced to abandon Homer entirely. This was a sensible mortification to me, as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard, therefore, to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer’s battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the daytime. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly—

¹ To Newton, January 13, 1784.

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that is to say, Mrs. Unwin and I together ; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world.

“ Mrs. Carter thinks on the subject of dreams as everybody else does—that is to say, according to her own experience. She has had no extraordinary ones, and therefore accounts them only the ordinary operations of the fancy. Mine are of a texture that will not suffer me to ascribe them to so inadequate a cause, or to any cause but the operation of an exterior agency. I have a mind, my dear (and to you I will venture to boast of it), as free from superstition as any man living, neither do I give heed to dreams in general as predictive, though particular dreams I believe to be so. Some very sensible persons, and I suppose Mrs. Carter among them, will acknowledge that in old times God spoke by dreams, but affirm with much boldness that He has since ceased to do so. If you ask them, why? they answer, because He has now revealed His will in the Scripture, and there is no longer any need that He should instruct or admonish us by dreams. I grant that with respect to doctrines and precepts He has left us in want of nothing ; but has He thereby precluded Himself in any of the operations of His Providence? Surely not. It is perfectly a different consideration ; and the same need that there ever was of His interference

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in this way, there is still, and ever must be while man continues blind and fallible and a creature beset with dangers which he can neither foresee nor obviate. His operations, however, of this kind are, I allow, very rare ; and as to the generality of dreams, they are made of such stuff, and are in themselves so insignificant, that though I believe them all to be the manufacture of others, not our own, I account it not a farthing-matter who manufactures them. So much for dreams !

“ My fever is not yet gone, but sometimes seems to leave me. It is altogether of the nervous kind and attended, now and then, with much dejection.

“ A young gentleman called here yesterday who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey to London from Glasgow, having just left the University there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of some of the Scotch professors for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it.

“ Adieu, very affectionately,

“ W. C.”

Then madness descended ; and when reason was restored the poet fell to reading Savary's “ Travels into Egypt,” “ The Mémoires du Baron de Tott ” of “ Henri de Lorraine,” and

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Barclay's "Argenis." Correspondence was exchanged with his friends as health and spirits mended, but now Samuel Teedon had entered his life—long-winded Teedon, ready to borrow a guinea or an old pair of breeches, to receive his quarterage in advance¹ or attend to the welfare of his patron's soul. A melancholy reflection! that this fine spirit should have fallen into bondage, subservient to the mandates of his oracle: "I have now persevered in the punctual performance of the duty of prayer as long, and I believe longer, than the time which you specified. Whether any beneficial effect has followed I cannot say. My wakings in the night have certainly been somewhat less painful and terrible than they were, but this I cannot help ascribing to the agency of an anodyne which I have constantly used lately at bedtime. Of one thing, however, I am sure, which is, that I have had no spiritual anodyne vouchsafed to *me*. My nights have been somewhat less disturbed, my days have of course been such likewise; but a settled melancholy overclouds them all; nothing cheers me, nothing inspires me with hope. It is even miraculous in my own eyes that, always occupied as I am in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, I am not absolutely incapacitated for the common offices of life.

"My purpose is to continue such prayer as I can make, although with all this reason to

¹ Teedon was by Cowper—thanks to some unknown friend—allowed £7 10s. per quarter. Wright, p. 587.

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conclude that it is not accepted, and though I have been more than once forbidden in my own apprehension by Him to whom it is addressed. You will tell me, that God never forbids anybody to pray, but, on the contrary, encourages all to do it. I answer—No. Some He does not encourage, and some He even forbids ; not by words perhaps, but by a secret negative found only in their experience.”¹

Once more his pathetic figure emerges in the following letter, now published for the first time.

“ To Mrs. Cowper.

“ Weston, Underwood,

“ Jan. 21, 1789.

“ My dear Cousin,—I beg you will never want encouragement to write to me. I am neither so great nor so good-for-nothing as to have forgotten your many kindnesses to me in years past, but I shall always rejoice to be informed of your well-being, and especially from yourself.

“ I thank you for your congratulations on the subject of my annuity. I was born to subsist at the expense of my friends ; in that and in that alone, God knows, resembling my Lord and Master. I shall ever, I hope, retain a grateful sense of the kindness of Lord Cowper to whom I was entirely a stranger ; but his bounty is a proof that he did not account me one.

“ I share sincerely with you the pleasure you

¹ To Teedon, October 1792.

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receive from the continuation of Henry's emolument to your daughter and my good cousin Maria. His lordship could not have bestowed it on a more deserving woman or who would make a better use of it.

" My dear cousin, I dwell in a snug corner of a beautiful country, in which are many walks, some in groves and some in fields and some by river's side, with which you would be delighted. If you would give indeed a pleasure to myself and Mrs. Unwin, come and visit it. We are quiet folks and will give you your own way, be it what it will. And this I mention beforehand as an inducement which nobody need despise, even though it be offered to a person gentle as yourself and a promoter always of the convenience of others. With my best love to all who belong to you, I remain, my dear cousin,

" Most affectionately yours,

" WM. COWPER."

Let not this picture remain—the sad, listless figure from whose step the spring has departed, with yellow withered cheeks and the dull gleam of madness in the eye—but rather this impression of the graceful, urbane critic plying skilful pen :

" To the Rev. William Unwin.

" Jan 17, 1782.

" My dear William,—I am glad we agree in our opinion of King Critic, and the writers on whom he has bestowed his animadversions. It

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is a matter of indifference to me whether I think with the world at large or not, but I wish my friends to be of my mind. The same work will wear a different appearance in the eyes of the same man, according to the different views with which he reads it ; if merely for his amusement, his candour being in less danger of a twist from interest or prejudice, he is pleased with what is really pleasing and is not over-curious to discover a blemish, because the exercise of a minute exactness is not consistent with his purpose. But if he once becomes a critic by trade, the case is altered. He must then, at any rate, establish, if he can, an opinion in every mind of his uncommon discernment and his exquisite taste. This great end he can never accomplish by thinking in the track that has been beaten under the hoof of public judgment. He must endeavour to convince the world that their favourite authors have more faults than they are aware of, and such as they have never suspected. Having marked out a writer universally esteemed, whom he finds it for that very reason convenient to depreciate and traduce, he will overlook some of his beauties, he will faintly praise others, and in such a manner as to make thousands, more modest, though quite as judicious as himself, question whether they are beauties at all. Can there be stronger illustration of all that I have said than the severity of Johnson's remarks upon Prior ? —I might have said the injustice ? His reputation as an author who, with much labour

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indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease, stood unshaken till Johnson thrust his head against it. And how does he attack him in this his principal fort? I cannot recollect his very words, but I am much mistaken indeed if my memory fails me with respect to the purport of them. 'His words,' he says, 'appear to be forced into their proper places; there indeed we find them, but find likewise that their arrangement has been the effect of constraint, and that without violence they would certainly have stood in a different order.' By your leave, most learned Doctor, this is the most disingenuous remark I ever met with, and would have come with a better grace from Curll or Dennis. Every man conversant with verse-writing knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshall the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior; many have imitated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original. And now to tell us, after we and our fathers have admired him for it so long, that

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he is an easy writer indeed, but that his ease has an air of stiffness in it, in short, that his ease is not ease but only something like it, what is it but a self-contradiction, an observation that grants what it is just going to deny and denies what it has just granted, in the same sentence and in the same breath? But I have filled the greatest part of my sheet with a very uninteresting subject. I will only say that as a nation we are not much indebted, in point of poetical credit, to this too sagacious and unmerciful judge, and that, for myself in particular, I have reason to rejoice that he entered upon and exhausted the labours of his office before my poor volume could possibly become an object of them. By the way, you cannot have a book at the time you mention; I have lived a fortnight or more in expectation of the last sheet, which is not yet arrived.

“ You have already furnished John’s memory with by far the greatest part of what a parent would wish to store it with. If all that is merely trivial, and all that has an immoral tendency, were expunged from our English poets, how would they shrink, and how would some of them completely vanish! I believe there are some of Dryden’s ‘ Fables ’ which he would find very entertaining; they are for the most part fine compositions, and not above his apprehension; but Dryden has written few things that are not blotted here and there with an unchaste allusion, so that you must pick

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his way for him lest he should tread in the dirt. You did not mention Milton's 'Allegro' and 'Penseroso,' which I remember being so charmed with when I was a boy that I was never weary of them. There are even passages in the paradisiacal part of the 'Paradise Lost' which he might study with advantage. And to teach him, as you can, to deliver some of the fine orations made in the Pandæmonium, and those between Satan, Ithuriel and Zephon, with emphasis, dignity, and propriety might be of great use to him hereafter. The sooner the ear is formed and the organs of speech are accustomed to the various inflections of the voice which the rehearsal of those passages demands, the better. I should think, too, that Thomson's 'Seasons' might afford him some useful lessons. At least they would have a tendency to give his mind an observing and a philosophical turn. I do not forget that he is but a child. But I remember that he is a child favoured with talents superior to his years. We were much pleased with his remarks on your almsgiving, and doubt not but it will be verified with respect to the two guineas you sent us, which have made four Christian people happy. Ships I have none, nor have I touched a pencil these three years ; if ever I take it up again, which I rather suspect I shall not (the employment requiring stronger eyes than mine), it shall be at John's service.

“ Yours, my dear friend,

“ W. C.”

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Litera scripta manet. Nor may we speak further on this theme, with Robert Lloyd's jingle in our ears :

The proverb still sticks closely by us
“ *Nil dictum quod non dictum prius.* ”

VIII

WHILE Cowper dallied with theme after theme which his friends suggested, finding no work for his hands to do, he was invited by his publisher to undertake an edition of Milton, which was to be on a more ambitious scale than any of its predecessors. Cowper was to be responsible for the annotations and the translation of the Latin and Italian poems ; Fuseli for the illustrations. Bagot and Hurdis were opposed to the idea, and the poet, unable to arrive at a definite decision and conscious of the difficulties of the task, consulted Teedon. The schoolmaster, who regarded himself as specially favoured by Providence, had already interpreted mysterious voices, and now in this matter wrestled earnestly in prayer. The answer being given that the poet was chosen for the work, he wrote to Johnson accepting the offer, and Milton proceeded. No sooner was the decision reached than Mrs. Unwin, dreading the idleness of winter, dispatched a letter of earnest thanks to the schoolmaster and desired the continuance of his prayers. Cowper translated the Latin and

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Italian poems, and for a time he worked strenuously. But his eyes gave him trouble ; he fell into low spirits and difficulties increased. He found himself unequal to the task of annotation, and the tormenting thought that he was neglecting the work drove him to distraction. He felt his genius crippled and numbed until the burden of his undertaking grew intolerable. "How often," he writes, "do I wish, in the course of every day, that I could be employed once more in poetry, and how often, of course, that the Miltonic trap had never caught me ! The year '92 shall stand chronicled in my remembrance as the most melancholy that I have ever known, except the few weeks that I spent at Eartham,¹ and such it has been principally because, being engaged to Milton, I felt myself no longer free for any other engagement. That ill-fated work, impracticable in itself, has made everything else impracticable." It eased his mind somewhat to hear from Johnson that he might choose his time over Milton ; but he had become incapable of concentrating his energies on that work. In despair at length he acknowledged defeat and returned to the revision of Homer.

There was, however, a further anxiety which preyed on the poet's mind and effectually hindered any progress being made with the Milton scheme. In January 1789 Mrs. Unwin had fallen on the ice-covered gravel, and lay helpless as a child for a whole fortnight. Her recovery

¹ The residence of William Hayley.

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was slow ; it was a month before she was able to descend to the poet's study. Throughout the year he makes ominous references to the state of her health, and although in a letter dated January 1789 he wrote in a spirit of resignation, " I have been so many years accustomed either to feel trouble or to expect it that habit has endued me with that sort of fortitude which I remember my old schoolmaster, Dr. Nicholl, used to call the passive valour of an ass," the accident caused him constant uneasiness. On December 21, 1791, he penned the melancholy tidings to Rose that Mrs. Unwin had been stricken with paralysis. Her speech and sight were affected. By January 1, however, she had partially recovered ; by the end of the month she was able to rejoin the poet in his study, and he recounted the progress of her convalescence in these words : " Her recovery has been extremely slow, and she is still feeble, but, I thank God, not so feeble but that I hope for her perfect restoration as the spring advances."

In March 1792 Sir John and Lady Throckmorton, as they now were, quitted the Hall for Bucklands, the family seat, on the death of Sir Robert, and Cowper felt their absence keenly. Of Sir John he wrote to Lady Hesketh : " Were I asked who in my judgment approaches nearest to him in all his amiable qualities and qualifications, I should certainly answer his brother George." Cowper now found consolation in the society of the latter, who continued to reside

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at the Hall and had assumed the name of Courtenay. "With him," he wrote, "as with his elder brother, I have always been on terms the most agreeable." In the following month he also made the acquaintance of the already mentioned William Hayley—about whom, Southey declared, everything was good except his poetry. Hayley resided at Eartham, in Sussex. The manner in which this acquaintance was brought about was as follows. Hayley had been commissioned by Boydell to write a Life for an edition of Milton, and the rumour was set afloat that he and Cowper were rivals. Hayley, acting on a generous impulse, dispatched a sonnet with which he enclosed a letter to Cowper—to whom he was quite unknown—in which he assured him that he was entirely ignorant that the latter was so engaged, and pointing out that the works were so entirely different that they would not clash. The packet was left at Johnson's, but, owing to some carelessness on his part, it was six weeks before it reached its destination. Hayley meanwhile, unaware that the missive had never been dispatched, suffered both "anxiety and mortification." As soon as Cowper received it, however, he replied and set Hayley's mind at rest. A visit to Weston being proposed, Cowper wrote: "It gives me the sincerest pleasure that I may hope to see you at Weston; for, as to any migrations of mine, they must, I fear, notwithstanding the joy I should feel in being a guest of yours, be still considered in the light

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of impossibilities." By May 1792 Hayley was the poet's guest at Weston, and he was "enchanted to find that the manners and conversation of Cowper resembled his poetry, charming by unaffected elegance and the graces of a benevolent spirit." He was presently to prove of incalculable service.

Returning one forenoon from their walk, the two friends were met at the door by Mr. Greatheed, who imparted the melancholy tidings that Mrs. Unwin had been seized with another paralytic attack of extreme gravity. She had lost the use of her right hand and arm and her speech was unintelligible. Hayley stood by the poet in his trial and earned undying gratitude. Before he left the patient was on the road to recovery, and a return visit to Earham had been promised, in the hope that the change might prove beneficial.

In July Cowper had his portrait painted by Abbot, and by the end of the month Mrs. Unwin was so far recovered that the hundred-and-twenty-mile journey to Earham could be faced. It was no light undertaking for the two recluses. To Mr. Bull the poet wrote, "Pray for us, my friend, that we may have a safe going and return. It is a tremendous exploit." On the way they met Rose at "The Mitre," and the General at Kingston, a stranger for thirty years ; and, at falling night on the third day, the poet, greatly marvelling at the tremendous height of the Sussex hills, found himself, together with his companion safe under Hayley's roof.

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Of Eartham he wrote enthusiastically : " Here we are as happy as it is in the power of terrestrial good to make us. It is almost a paradise in which we dwell, and our reception has been the kindest that it was possible for friendship and hospitality to contrive." He made the acquaintance of his correspondent Hurdis, in whom he found a resemblance to Unwin both in face and figure ; of Romney, and of Charlotte Smith, now engaged in writing " The Old Manor House," and was astonished by her powers of rapid composition. In the evenings they had pleasant little gatherings, when she read to the assembled circle " whatever the fertility of her fancy had produced in the course of a long studious morning." Cowper was in health and spirits, and Mrs. Unwin's condition gave ground for satisfaction. But his pen was mainly idle ; " like the man in the fable, who could leap nowhere well but at Rhodes," he seemed incapable of writing at all except at Weston. He dispatched, however, to Mrs. Courtenay Fop's " Epitaph," which runs as follows :

EPITAPH ON " FOP "

A Dog belonging to Lady Throckmorton

Though once a puppy, and though Fop by name,
Here moulders one whose bones some honour claim
No sycophant, although of spaniel race,
And though no hound, a martyr to the chase.

Ye squirrels, rabbits, leverets, rejoice !
Your haunts no longer echo to his voice ;

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This record of his fate exulting view,
He died worn out with vain pursuit of you.

“ Yes ”—the indignant shade of Fop replies—

“ And worn with vain pursuit, man also dies ! ”

He also revised his Latin and Italian translations of Milton, and assisted Hayley with his rendering of Andreini's “ Adamo ”—worthless toil—but chiefly delighted in the library. At Hayley's request, Romney drew the poet's portrait in crayons. Cowper considered it an admirable likeness, and on his return to Weston he wrote his celebrated lines :

TO GEORGE ROMNEY, ESQ.

*On his picture of me in crayons, drawn at
Eartham in the sixty-first year of my age, and
in the months of August and September 1792.*

Romney, expert infallibly to trace

On chart or canvas, not the form alone

And semblance, but, however faintly shown,

The mind's impression too on every face,

With strokes that time ought never to erase ;

Thou hast so pencilled mine, that though I own

The subject worthless, I have never known

The artist shining with superior grace.

But this I mark—that symptoms none of woe

In thy incomparable work appear.

Well ! I am satisfied, it should be so,

Since, on maturer thought, the cause is clear :

For in my looks what sorrow couldst thou see,

When I was Hayley's guest, and sat to thee ?

But, pleasant as life at Eartham was, and kind
though his host might be, the poet began ere

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long to experience an intolerable longing for Weston. Although Mrs. Unwin had benefited by the change (she could, however, still neither read nor work), the prospect of the return journey was no less terrifying than had been the journey thither. After a six weeks' stay they set out with much trepidation, again meeting the General and Rose on the journey. The latter had invited the Welsh bard, Williams, to meet the poet at breakfast. But Cowper, despite the efforts of Rose to draw him into conversation, oppressed by the knowledge that he was in London, which held for him so many sad associations, remained silent during the meal. And, after a journey of depression and anxiety, the chaise deposited them all at the back door "in the dark and in a storm at eight at night."

The following letter, hitherto unpublished, contains a reference to Cowper's visit to Hayley.¹ It was on this occasion that Romney drew his famous sketch, which Blake idealized.

"To Mr. Joseph Hill.

"Weston,

"30 Nov., 1792.

"I find myself in want of many things but chiefly of money, and shall be obliged to you for a draft to such amount as my budget will supply. Among other extraordinaries incidental to the present year I have found it necessary to be my own dairyman and to purchase cows. For your great city devours every thing, so that

¹ Since the above lines were written the letter has appeared in one of the publications of the "Cowper Society."

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it is impossible any longer to find a pound of butter or cream to our tea in all the country.

“ I have found that it is possible to change the air and the scene, and to derive no benefit from either. In the hope of it, however, both to Mrs. Unwin and myself, I journeyed last summer into Sussex, as probably you have heard. I was extremely low in spirits when I went and had been so for some time, and my poor fellow-traveller had been almost deprived of the use of her limbs by something like a paralytic stroke in the spring. There we spent six weeks, breathing the purest air, in the neighbourhood of the sea, and in a country most magnificent. But I returned the miserable thing I went, and poor Mrs. Unwin little better. My spirits, however, have improved within the last week or ten days, quite contrary to my expectation, for I assured myself that as we sunk deeper into the winter I should grow worse. December and January have long been my terrors, for when I have plunged into greater depths of melancholy than usual, these months have always been the fatal season. But no more of this. It will give me true pleasure to hear that you are well and cheerful and that Mrs. Hill is so likewise. I beg my compliments to her and remain

“ Sincerely and affectionately yours,

“ WM. COWPER.”

The story of these last days, when the gloom lightened rarely, makes sad reading. Scarce had

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Cowper reached Weston when he was threatened with a return of his old malady, happily staved off. Mrs. Unwin was failing in mind and body. The poet, encompassed by terrors by day and night, bethought him of the schoolmaster, made him his confidant, threw open the secrets of his soul, and awaited the oracular interpretation. Such entries as the following from Teedon's Diary¹ tell their own story.

"Nov. 4.² I went over after dinner to Mad^m,³ met the Esq^r⁴ who gave a most dreadful acct of the state of his mind, &c. I went on to Mad^m, prayed, & came home at the time of the lessons read^g.

"Nov. 7. Rec^d a Note from the Esq^r of sorrow.

"Nov. 11. . . . Writ to the Esq^r. Advised 7 days prayer, morn & eve from the example of Elijahs serv^t.

"Dec. 4. I rec^d a letter from the Esq^r again desiring to be prayed for respect^g Milton.

"Feb. 16.⁵ I went to Weston to the Esq^r's, found Jones called but did not see Mrs. U. The Esq^r related his dream of converse with Milton.

"May 18. I writ to the Esq^r in Ans^r. 'I will turn the flinty rock into a springing well,' & the Boy called for it when just done. The Lord give an especial Blessing. I went & found Mad^m going to walk with Mr. Johnson & Sam.⁶ I

¹ "The Diary of Samuel Teedon, October 17, 1781, to February 2, 1794." Edited by Th. Wright, 1902.

² 1792.

³ Mrs. Unwin.

⁴ Cowper,

⁵ 1793.

⁶ Sam Roberts, Cowper's man-servant.

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went likewise, drank tea with them. J. Higgins came in & Johnson & he went to walk. I asked Mad^m for a Guinea, & luckily Mr. Cowper came in for she had none, who gave it to me. . . .”

So the schoolmaster made his entries, throwing light on much that was dark ; prescribing the time and manner of prayer, interpreting the haunting voices, and filling volumes with his rubbish. Alas ! in his dotage the poet drank in the words that fell from the lips of his medium—a garrulous pedant in threadbare blue coat and black breeches and soiled waistcoat ! Miserable story !¹

His eyesight growing worse, he dared not write by candle-light, and despair settled once more. He was assailed by terrors unspeakable, and haunted by morbid dreams at night. Relief in prayer was denied him. “ I dream in the night,” he wrote to Teedon, “ that God has rejected me finally and that all promises and all answers to prayer made for me are mere delusions. . . . I believe myself the only instance of a man to whom God will promise everything and perform nothing.” Laudanum soothed

¹ From August 27, 1791, to February 2, 1794, a period of 891 days, no fewer than 277 recorded letters passed between Olney and Weston, namely :

From Cowper to Teedon	72 letters.
„ Mrs. Unwin to Teedon	17 „
„ Teedon to Cowper	126 „
„ Teedon to Mrs. Unwin	62 „

It is rather sad to say there are good grounds for the supposition that the list is by no means a complete one. . . . In the period covered by the diary, some two and a half years, no fewer than ninety-two visits of Teedon to Cowper are recorded, being an average of about one every nine days—hence there was a letter or a visit every three or four days. Wright, “ Life of Cowper,” pp. 586 and 588.

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him, and he found momentary relief in gardening and in the writing of occasional verses to Hayley. He nursed Mrs. Unwin with tenderness and devotion, but, alas ! the devoted companion was grown sadly frail—a melancholy figure, helpless in body, feeble in mind. It is very pitiful to read those playful letters written in agony of soul or these gentle verses, universally known, with their sad remembrance of things past :

TO MARY

The twentieth year is well nigh past,
Since first our sky was overcast ;
Ah, would that this might be the last !
My Mary !

Thy spirits have a fainter flow,
I see thee daily weaker grow ;
'Twas my distress that brought thee low,
My Mary !

Thy needles, once a shining store,
For my sake restless heretofore,
Now rust disused, and shine no more,
My Mary !¹

For though thou gladly wouldst fulfil
The same kind office for me still,
Thy sight now seconds not thy will,
My Mary !

But well thou playedst the housewife's part,
And all thy threads with magic art
Have wound themselves about this heart,
My Mary !

¹ Cavilled at by Coleridge in "Anima Poetæ."

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Thy indistinct expressions seem
Like language uttered in a dream ;
Yet me they charm, whate'er the theme,
My Mary !

Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of orient light,
My Mary !

For, could I view nor them nor thee,
What sight worth seeing could I see ?
The sun would rise in vain for me,
My Mary !

Partakers of thy sad decline,
Thy hands their little force resign ;
Yet, gently prest, press gently mine,
My Mary !

Such feebleness of limbs thou provest,
That now at every step thou movest
Upheld by two, yet still thou lovest,
My Mary !

And still to love, though prest with ill,
In wintry age to feel no chill,
With me is to be lovely still,
My Mary !

But ah ! by constant heed I know,
How oft the sadness that I show
Transforms thy smiles to looks of woe,
My Mary !

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And should my future lot be cast
With much resemblance of the past,
Thy worn-out heart will break at last,
My Mary !

Autumn of 1793.

In October 1793 Cowper received an invitation from Lord Spencer to meet Gibbon at Althorpe, which was declined. Hayley, visiting Weston in November, found Rose and Johnson there, and the two poets revised Homer and Milton together, Mrs. Unwin sitting by mumbling and chattering to herself in her corner. On November 24 he announced the suspension—the actual abandonment—of the Miltonic scheme to Hurdis, now filling the professorship of poetry at Oxford. Hayley, who spent over a fortnight at Weston, departed filled with apprehension for the condition of his host. On December 8 he wrote to Hayley : “ It is a great relief to me that my Milton labours are suspended. I am now busy in transcribing the alterations of Homer, having finished the whole revisal. I must then write a new Preface, which done I shall endeavour immediately to descant on ‘ The Four Ages.’ ” Hayley was succeeded at Weston by Lady Hesketh, whom the poet had not seen for two years. The previous year she had been ill herself at Bath, during the time of her annual winter visit. Her presence cheered the poet greatly. She found a terrible state of affairs in the sad household. The helpless couple were at the mercy of poor, spoilt, extravagant, giddy, love-letter-

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writing Hannah Wilson, the poet's *protégée*, thoroughly spoilt by her boarding-school. Cowper spoke highly of her devotedness to Mrs. Unwin, during the illness following on the fall in the winter of 1788-89; but now she was ill-behaved, thankless, careless, her head filled with romantic nonsense, pluming and strutting, and giving herself airs in ill-becoming finery. Lady Hesketh entered vain protest; Weston was like to be ruined by her extravagance.

The New Year opened cheerlessly. Cowper, sunk in profoundest misery, sat during six days "still and silent as death," barely tasting food or drink, and all attempts to rouse him from his stupor were unavailing. At length Mrs. Unwin, now grown peevish and exacting, was made to understand the situation with difficulty. She observed that the morning was fine, and that she would fain attempt a walk. The poet rose gallantly and offered his arm—and this, as Southey remarks, "appears to have been the last instance in which her influence over him was exerted for his good." Johnson was with him for a time, but again the gloom had gathered. On April 8 Mr. Greatheed wrote to Hayley that the poet refused food and medicine, shunned society, and on these accounts Lady Hesketh dared not ask his company, rejoiced as she would be at his arrival. Scarce had Hayley read this letter, his kind heart overflowing, when he hastened to the side of his friend, while Lady Hesketh posted to London to consult the

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celebrated alienist Dr. Willis. To the latter, who had made his name by his skilful treatment of the king's insanity, Thurlow wrote, directing his attention to the poet. He came to Weston, examined the patient, prescribed, shook his professional head, and hurried back to town. The news from Lord Spencer arrived—alas! immaterial to the poet—that a pension of £300 a year had been conferred on him by the king—small thanks to Thurlow. Then warm-hearted Hayley must, to his own sorrow, away—so passing for ever out of our poet's life. It was a sad year for Lady Hesketh, fighting single-handed the battle; a year of unbroken anxiety, with the poet walking incessantly in study or bedchamber, dreading hourly his summons, afraid lest some one might take possession of his bed and prevent him lying down in it any more,¹ and Mrs. Unwin lingering on in living death. At length the situation became intolerable: her ladyship wrote to Johnson, now Reverend, who arrived and saw with his own eyes how matters stood. With great difficulty he persuaded Cowper and Mrs. Unwin to return to Norfolk with him for temporary change. When the hour of departure came, the poet, with sad foreboding, stole to his bedchamber and scrawled these lines heart-brokenly on the shutter:

Farewell, dear scenes, for ever closed to me;
Oh, for what sorrows must I now exchange ye.²

¹ Lady Hesketh to Mr. Johnson, May 5, 1795.

² Four additional lines are given by Wright, p. 638.

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And in vain regret for Weston passed the lucid intervals that remained. The first night of the journey was spent at Eaton Socon, where, walking through the churchyard in the moonlight, he cheerfully discussed the "Seasons" with Johnson. At North Tuddenham they rested for three weeks. Thence they moved to Mundesley, which was associated with early years, and where the monotonous sound of the breakers soothed him ; and finally, on October 7, to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham. There the poet, owing to the weak state of his eyes, was compelled to remain for the most part indoors, when Johnson, constantly by his side, read aloud to him the novels of Richardson, the poor wandering mind vainly attempting to follow. Wakefield's criticism of certain passages of his Homer roused him. He sought them out and made certain corrections and began the revision of the whole of his version. But this was speedily abandoned. The voices dinned constantly in his ears : in vain a tube was inserted in the wall—a melancholy ruse—through which a comforting voice spoke ; nothing shook his settled conviction of irrevocable doom. In October 1796 the invalids were moved to Johnson's house at East Dereham.

Scarcely settled there, Mrs. Unwin sank rapidly, and on December 17 the sands had run through. Johnson broke the news to the poet, and later in the day, after fierce conflict with horrors, he entered the death-chamber. Gazing

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for a moment on the calm, still face, grief found utterance in one passionate cry, and he was led gently away. Hereafter of her no word.

On May 15, 1797, he wrote these despairing lines with altered handwriting to Lady Hesketh, now an invalid at Clifton : " To you once more, and too well I know why, I am under cruel necessity of writing. Every line that I have ever sent you I have believed, under the influence of infinite despair, the last that I should ever send. This I know to be so. Whatever be your condition, either now or hereafter, it is heavenly compared with mine even at this moment. It is unnecessary to add that this comes from the most miserable of beings, whom a terrible minute made such."

The revision of *Homer*, laid aside a year earlier, interested him apathetically, and henceforth, when sense pierced madness, it formed his only employment. Occasional visitors arrived, the Dowager Lady Spencer and Sir John Throckmorton, now grown greyer ; Johnson read Gibbon aloud, and the poet's own works, " *John Gilpin* " excepted ; Miss Perowne, taking Mrs. Unwin's place, soothed sad hours.

On March 8, 1799, *Homer* was revised, and three days later he commenced his Latin verses, " *Montes Glaciales*," which, at Miss Perowne's request, he translated into English. On March 20 he wrote the " *Castaway* " stanzas, founded on an incident recorded in " *Anson's Voyages* " which he had read years before.

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THE CASTAWAY

Obscurest night involved the sky,
The Atlantic billows roared,
When such a destined wretch as I,
Washed headlong from on board,
Of friends, of hope, of all bereft,
His floating home for ever left.

No braver chief could Albion boast
Than he with whom he went,
Nor ever ship left Albion's coast
With warmer wishes sent,
He loved them both, but both in vain,
Nor him beheld, nor her again.

Not long beneath the whelming brine,
Expert to swim, he lay ;
Nor soon he felt his strength decline,
Or courage die away ;
But waged with death a lasting strife,
Supported by despair of life.

He shouted : nor his friends had failed
To check the vessel's course,
But so the furious blast prevailed,
That, pitiless perforce,
They left their outcast mate behind,
And scudded still before the wind.

Some succour yet they could afford ;
And such as storms allow,
The cask, the coop, the floated chord,
Delayed not to bestow.
But he (they knew) nor ship nor shore,
Whate'er they gave, should visit more.

POETRY & LIFE

WORDSWORTH
& HIS POETRY

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BY

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Extension Board of the University of London
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WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

THE life of Wordsworth yields little of interest to the biographer in search of materials for a good story. It was a long life of continuous industry and of great achievement. But so far as outward fortunes were concerned it was singularly uneventful. Some stir of excitement, it is true, entered into it during a few years of storm and stress. That excitement, however, was over by the time Wordsworth was twenty-six, and with his settlement at Grasmere, when he had still half a century of poetic activity before him, "the external events of his life," to use the words of one of his most sympathetic critics, "may be said to come to an end." Henceforth he dwelt for the most part in retirement and "from the crowded street remote"¹; not indeed as a recluse, for he was never that; but as one who, like Cowper, looked out upon the world by preference "through the loopholes of retreat." It was a happy life, too—and happy lives are notoriously undramatic; a life of steady calm, broken only by those occasional sorrows which are inseparable from the common human lot. Even the interest of struggle against circumstance was lacking in it. For many years Wordsworth was poor. But he never had to fight his way. To one of his frugal habits the

¹ "The Excursion," I.

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meagre resources of his early manhood were ample for all immediate needs ; and as fresh needs arose a kindly providence seemed ever ready to meet them.

Nor must we expect to find in Wordsworth's biography much of that inner interest which in the life of a man of letters often takes the place of the outer interest which we look for in the life of a man of action. His intellectual history after manhood had been reached was almost as uneventful as the history of his external career. At thirty his mind had come to its full development, and he had learned from experience all that experience had to teach. Then his thought hardened, and the hardening process inevitably meant cessation of growth. His own refusal to admit a chronological arrangement of his poems, perverse as it certainly was, had therefore this amount of justification, that such an arrangement would have little to tell us about the evolution of his mind.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky :
So was it when my life began ;
So is it now I am a man ;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die !
The Child is father of the Man ;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

These familiar lines deserve to be placed where Wordsworth placed them, in the forefront of

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his collective works, for they express not only, as he intended, the continuity, but also the striking uniformity of his intellectual life.

Though, as we shall see, the connexion between Wordsworth's poetry and his personal experience is of the closest kind, a comparatively slight body of narrative will therefore serve us here as the framework of our study. It will, moreover, be clear that in the writing of this narrative the demands of symmetry must be disregarded, since for our purposes a much fuller treatment is required of the years in which his character was being formed and the lines of his work determined, than of that long after-period during which, his poetic education complete and his plans fully settled,¹ his mind rested at peace within itself. It is fortunate that in what is thus the most important part of our subject we shall be able to rely upon the authority of the poet himself. When on his retirement to "his native mountains" he resolved "to construct a literary work that might live," it was, he felt, "a reasonable thing" that before addressing himself to his task "he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far Nature and Education had qualified him for such an employment." He therefore "undertook to record, in verse, the origin and progress of his own powers, as far as he was acquainted with them"²; and the result was the long autobiographical poem

¹ See "The Prelude," xiv. 302-311.

² Preface to "The Excursion."

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which, kept in manuscript till after his death, was then published under the title suggested by his widow—"The Prelude." Wordsworth regarded it as a "thing unprecedented in literary history that a man should talk so much about himself,"¹ and he very justly found fault with its "redundancies." Yet its wealth of minute detail makes it specially valuable, and if in many places it is prolix and even dull, it is always illuminating. This poem we shall here take as our chief guide through the first thirty years of Wordsworth's life, drawing upon it freely even when its actual language is not reproduced.

II

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH was born on April 7, 1770, at Cockermouth, Cumberland. His father, John Wordsworth, was an attorney-at-law and land-agent to Sir James Lowther, afterwards Lord Lonsdale; his mother Anne (Cookson), the daughter of a flourishing Penrith tradesman. He was the second of five children, his elder brother Richard being his senior by two years. Then came the one girl of the family, Dorothy, whose name is indissolubly linked with his own, and the two younger brothers, John and Christopher.

William was only eight when a great calamity

¹ Letter to Beaumont, May 1, 1805. Evidently he forgot Montaigne and Rousseau.

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befell the family in the death of his "honoured mother" :

she who was the heart
And hinge of all our learnings and our loves :
She left us destitute, and, as we might,
Trooping together.¹

His wife's premature death was a blow from which John Wordsworth never recovered, and he himself followed her six years later at the early age of forty-two. William, then fourteen, was at that time a schoolboy at Hawkshead, Lancashire.

The venerable Grammar School at Hawkshead was then one of the best educational establishments in the north of England, and Wordsworth's recollections of his nine years there (1778-1787) were entirely pleasant. The boys did not live in dormitories, but boarded out with "dames" in and about the "antique market-village."² This feature of school life kept a special place in his memory.

Ye lowly cottages wherein we dwelt,
A ministration of your own was yours ;
Can I forget you, being as you were
So beautiful among the pleasant fields
In which ye stood ? or can I here forget
The plain and seemly countenance with which
Ye dealt out your plain comforts ?³

He recalled with particular satisfaction the
"home-amusements by the warm peat fire"

¹ "The Prelude," v. 157-260.

² "The Excursion," i. 53.

³ "The Prelude," i. 499-505.

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in the long winter evenings, and the games of whist and loo and other pastimes "too humble to be named in verse," while outside "incessant rain was falling, or the frost raged bitterly"; and if the "daily meals were frugal," they were wholesome and were seasoned with "vigorous hunger." His own dame during his whole school-time was an elderly spinster named Anne Tyson, a warm-hearted, motherly creature of whom afterwards he always spoke in terms of great affection. How deep was the hold Hawkshead had gained upon him is shown by the fact that as soon as the first summer vacation released him from Cambridge, he hastened back thither, saw again with delight

the snow-white church upon her hill
Sit like a thronèd Lady, sending out
A gracious look all over her domain,¹

and "with eager footsteps" reached "the cottage threshold" which was the special object of his pilgrimage. Then followed all the pleasures which attend the renewing of old associations.

Glad welcome had I, with some tears, perhaps,
From my old Dame, so kind and motherly,
While she perused me with a parent's pride.
The thoughts of gratitude shall fall like dew
Upon thy grave, good creature! While my heart
Can beat never will I forget thy name. ✠
Heaven's blessing be upon thee where thou liest
After thy innocent and busy stir

¹ "The Prelude," iv. 21-23.

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In narrow cares, thy little daily growth
Of calm enjoyments, after eighty years,
And more than eighty, of untroubled life ;
Childless, yet by the strangers to thy blood
Honoured with little less than filial love.
What joy was mine to see thee once again,
Thee and thy dwelling, and a crowd of things
About its narrow precincts all beloved,
And many of them seeming yet my own !
Why should I speak of what a thousand hearts
Have felt, and every man alive can guess ?
The rooms, the court, the garden were not left
Long unsaluted, nor the sunny seat
Round the stone table under the dark pine,
Friendly to studious or to festive hours ;
Nor that unruly child of mountain birth,
The famous brook, who, soon as he was boxed
Within our garden, found himself at once,
As if by trick insidious and unkind,
Stripped of his voice and left to dimple down
(Without an effort and without a will)
A channel paved by man's officious care.
I looked at him and smiled, and smiled again,
And in the press of twenty thousand thoughts,
“ Ha,” quoth I, “ pretty prisoner, are you there ! ”
Well might sarcastic Fancy then have whispered,
“ An emblem here behold of thy own life ;
In its late course of even days with all
Their smooth enthrallment ; ” but the heart was full,
Too full for that reproach. My aged Dame
Walked proudly at my side : she guided me ;
I willing, nay—nay, wishing to be led.
—The face of every neighbour whom I met
Was like a volume to me ; some were hailed
Upon the road, some busy at their work,

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Unceremonious greetings interchanged
With half the length of a long field between.
Among my schoolfellows I scattered round
Like recognitions, but with some constraint
Attended, doubtless, with a little pride,
But with more shame, for my habiliments,
The transformation wrought by gay attire.
Not less delighted did I take my place
At our domestic table : and, dear Friend !
In this endeavour simply to relate
A Poet's history, may I leave untold
The thankfulness with which I laid me down
In my accustomed bed, more welcome now
Perhaps than if it had been more desired
Or been more often thought of with regret ;
That lowly bed whence I had heard the wind
Roar, and the rain beat hard ; where I so oft
Had lain awake on summer nights to watch
The moon in splendour couched among the leaves
Of a tall ash, that near our cottage stood ;
Had watched her with fixed eyes while to and fro
In the dark summit of the waving tree
She rocked with every impulse of the breeze.¹

One old friend from whom he received a hearty welcome on that memorable return to his well-loved haunts calls for passing mention—the “rough terrier” who had been his faithful companion in many a ramble.

Among the masters at Hawkshead there was one, the Rev. William Taylor, who, though he died while Wordsworth was still at school, and so passed early out of his life, left a deep im-

¹ “The Prelude,” iv, 27-92.

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pression upon him.¹ He is particularly interesting to us here because he was in part the original of the Matthew of the poems, whom we know as a typical representative of Wordsworth's ideal of simple manhood and as an exponent of his elemental philosophy.

The sighs which Matthew heaved were sighs
Of one tired out with fun and madness ;
The tears which came to Matthew's eyes
Were tears of light, the dew of gladness.

Yet, sometimes, when the secret cup
Of still and serious thought went round,
It seemed as if he drank it up—
He felt with spirit so profound.²

Such was Matthew's "happy soul." Such had been Taylor's. We must remember, however, that while many of Taylor's characteristics enter into his composition, Matthew is confessedly an idealization. "Like the Wanderer in 'The Excursion,' this schoolmaster was made up of several, both of his class and men of other occupations."³

A boy of Wordsworth's disposition is certain to get much of his most valuable education from independent contact with things outside the class-room walls ; and it was fortunate for him, therefore, that the routine at Hawkshead left him plenty of opportunity to go his own way. If his schooldays were "very happy

¹ For a touching reference to his illness and death see "Address to the Scholars of the Village School of —."

² "Matthew."

³ Wordsworth's note to "Matthew."

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ones," it was, he afterwards said, "chiefly because I was left at liberty then, and in the vacations, to read whatever books I liked. For example, I read all Fielding's works, 'Don Quixote,' 'Gil Blas,' and any part of Swift that I liked—'Gulliver's Travels' and the 'Tale of the [*sic*] Tub' being both much to my taste." There is nothing to show that his poetic genius was at all precocious. His first verses were composed as a task set by his master, the subject being "The Summer Vacation," though he was moved to add a sequel on his own account on "Return to School." "There was nothing," he declares, "remarkable in either poem; but I was called upon among other scholars to write verses upon the completion of the second centenary from the foundation of the school in 1585 by Archbishop Sandys. These verses were much admired—far more than they deserved, for they were but a tame imitation of Pope's versification, and a little in his style."

As an example of the kind of verse which Wordsworth was capable of producing when a boy I will quote a passage from "Lines written as a School Exercise at Hawkshead, Anno Ætatis 14":

When Superstition left the golden light
And fled indignant to the shades of night;
When pure Religion reared the peaceful breast
And lulled the warring passions into rest,
Drove far away the savage thoughts that roll
In the dark mansions of the bigot's soul,

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Enlivening Hope displayed her cheerful ray,
And beamed on Britain's sons a brighter day ;
So when on Ocean's face the storm subsides,
Hushed are the winds and silent are the tides ;
The God of day, in all the pomp of light,
Moves through the vault of heaven, and dissipates
the night.

And so on and so on. These lines are well enough in their way, and their smoothness and correctness are rather remarkable. But they are of course in the conventional manner of the time ; they are purely imitative ; they are such as any clever boy of fourteen might have written ; and they certainly give no promise of unusual poetic powers in years to come. After this, however, his genius must soon have begun to grow, for we recognize a very different quality in the following :

EXTRACT

FROM THE CONCLUSION OF A POEM, COMPOSED
IN ANTICIPATION OF LEAVING SCHOOL

Dear native regions, I foretell,
From what I feel at this farewell,
That, wheresoe'er my steps may tend,
And whensoe'er my course shall end,
If in that hour a single tie
Survive of local sympathy,
My soul will cast the backward view,
The longing look alone on you.
Thus, while the Sun sinks down to rest
Far in the regions of the west,
Though to the vale no parting beam
Be given, not one memorial gleam,

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

A lingering light he fondly throws
On the dear hills where first he rose.

Here there is the accent of truth and sincerity, and Wordsworth was right in praising the beauty of the closing image. It is interesting to note that these lines were afterwards recast in blank verse in "The Prelude." Wordsworth first describes the spot and the circumstances in which they were written, and then proceeds to paraphrase the thoughts which flowed "in a pure stream of words fresh from the heart."

A grove there is whose boughs
Stretch from the western marge of Thurstonmere,
With length of shade so thick, that whoso glides
Along the line of low-roofed water, moves
As in a cloister. Once—while, in that shade
Loitering, I watched the golden beams of light
Flung from the setting sun, as they reposed
In silent beauty on the naked ridge
Of a high eastern hill—thus flowed my thoughts
In a pure stream of words fresh from the heart :
Dear native Regions, wheresoe'er shall close
My mortal course, there will I think on you ;
Dying, will cast on you a backward look ;
Even as this setting sun (albeit the Vale
Is nowhere touched by one memorial gleam)
Doth with the fond remains of his last power
Still linger, and a farewell lustre sheds,
On the dear mountain-tops where first he rose.¹

The quotation just made leads us directly to what is incomparably the most potent element

¹ "The Prelude," viii. 458-475.

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in Wordsworth's early education—the awakening of his love of nature. At first this was only a healthy boy's love of the open air and the freedom of the fields. Boating on Esthwaite Water in summer, skating on the frozen lake in winter beneath the sparkling stars, long rambles at dawn, nutting and bird's-nesting : nature to begin with meant these things for him as for his companions, and meant little else.

A boy I loved the sun,
Not as I since have loved him, as a pledge
And surety of our earthly life, a light
Which we behold and feel we are alive ;
Nor for his bounty to so many worlds—
But for this cause, that I had seen him lay
His beauty on the morning hills, had seen
The western mountain touch his setting orb,
In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy.¹

But before long this animal love of nature began to change into a love which was mystical and spiritual. The "creative soul" awoke and the world became alive for him with strange hints and symbols. A new glory and a new meaning stole across the face of familiar things, and whispers came to him from afar which seemed "most audible, then, when the fleshly ear . . . forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed." This great transformation in his relations with nature—this heightening and

¹ "The Prelude," ii, 178-188.

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deepening of his primitive feelings—was, of course, gradual. There was also, as we shall see presently, an intermediate stage in his development. Yet certain experiences stood out as landmarks in his mind. One such is commemorated in the lines entitled “Nutting,” originally intended for “The Prelude,” but omitted “as not being wanted there.” “These verses,” Wordsworth told Miss Fenwick, “arose out of the remembrance of feelings I had often had when a boy.” The expedition described was in object an ordinary nutting expedition only, and the lad set out in his oldest clothes and with wallet and crook, intent, as on many a former occasion, upon the ripe wealth of the hazel coppices he already knew so well. But while he was exulting in the results of his “merciless ravage,” a sudden shock of pain gave him pause. He realized that he had somehow inflicted injury upon the life that was all about him and felt the reproof of the “silent trees” and “the intruding sky.” This new sense of the life in nature—of the “spirit in the woods”—never afterwards forsook him.

NUTTING

It seems a day
(I speak of one from many singled out)
One of those heavenly days that cannot die ;
When, in the eagerness of boyish hope,
I left our cottage-threshold, sallying forth
With a huge wallet o'er my shoulders slung,
A nutting-crook in hand ; and turned my steps

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Tow'rd some far-distant wood, a Figure quaint,
Tricked out in proud disguise of cast-off weeds
Which for that service had been husbanded, |
By exhortation of my frugal Dame—
Motley accoutrement, of power to smile
At thorns, and brakes, and brambles,—and, in truth,
More ragged than need was ! O'er pathless rocks,
Through beds of matted fern, and tangled thickets,
Forcing my way, I came to one dear nook
Unvisited, where not a broken bough
Drooped with its withered leaves, ungracious sign
Of devastation ; but the hazels rose
Tall and erect, with tempting clusters hung,
A virgin scene !—A little while I stood,
Breathing with such suppression of the heart
As joy delights in ; and, with wise restraint
Voluptuous, fearless of a rival, eyed
The banquet ;—or beneath the trees I sate
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played ;
A temper known to those, who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blest
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.
Perhaps it was a bower beneath whose leaves
The violets of five seasons re-appear
And fade, unseen by any human eye ;
Where fairy water-breaks do murmur on
For ever ; and I saw the sparkling foam,
And—with my cheek on one of those green stones
That, fleeced with moss, under the shady trees,
Lay round me, scattered like a flock of sheep—
I heard the murmur and the murmuring sound,
In that sweet mood when pleasure loves to pay
Tribute to ease ; and, of its joy secure,
The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
Wasting its kindness on stocks and stones,

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

And on the vacant air. Then up I rose,
And dragged to earth both branch and bough, with
crash

And merciless ravage : and the shady nook
Of hazels, and the green and mossy bower,
Deformed and sullied, patiently gave up
Their quiet being : and, unless I now
Confound my present feelings with the past ;
Ere from the mutilated bower I turned
Exulting, rich beyond the wealth of kings,
I felt a sense of pain when I beheld
The silent trees, and saw the intruding sky—
Then, dearest Maiden, move along these shades
In gentleness of heart ; with gentle hand
Touch—for there is a spirit in the woods.

Another noteworthy experience is recorded in
“ The Prelude.” One summer evening he
pushed out alone for a row on the lake. It was
a stolen pleasure, and perhaps he thought to
enjoy it all the more on that account. Absolute
stillness hung over the waters ; above him
“ was nothing but the stars and the grey sky ” ;
beyond, a peak towered up “ black and huge.”
A great awe fell upon him as he rowed :

I struck and struck again,
And growing still in stature the grim shape
Towered up between me and the stars, and still,
For so it seemed, with purpose of its own
And measured motion like a living thing,
Strode after me. With trembling oars I turned,
And through the silent water stole my way
Back to the covert of the willow tree ;
There in her mooring-place I left my bark,—
And through the meadows homeward went, in grave

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And serious mood ; but after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Worked with a dim and undetermined sense
Of unknown modes of being ; o'er my thoughts
There hung a darkness, call it solitude
Or blank desertion.¹

An indistinct feeling was left with him of
something vast and mysterious.

No familiar shapes
Remained, no pleasant images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields ;
But huge and mighty forms, that do not live
Like living men, moved slowly through the mind
By day, and were a trouble to my dreams.²

Then follows a fine passage of recapitulation :

Wisdom and Spirit of the universe !
Thou Soul that art the eternity of thought
That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion, not in vain
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
The passions that build up our human soul ;
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,
But with high objects, with enduring things—
With life and nature—purifying thus
The elements of feeling and of thought,
And sanctifying, by such discipline,
Both pain and fear, until we recognise
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart.
Nor was this fellowship vouchsafed to me
With stinted kindness. In November days,

¹ "The Prelude," i. 380-395.

² *Ibid.* 395-400.

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When vapours rolling down the valley made
A lonely scene more lonesome, among woods,
At noon and 'mid the calm of summer nights,
When, by the margin of the trembling lake,
Beneath the gloomy hills homeward I went
In solitude, such intercourse was mine ;
Mine was it in the fields both day and night,
And by the waters, all the summer long.¹

Through such experiences as these the spiritual significance of the universe was gradually revealed to him. "The earth and the common face of Nature" began to speak to him "rememberable things."

'Twere long to tell
What spring and autumn, what the winter snows,
And what the summer shade, what day and night,
Evening and morning, sleep and waking, thought
From sources inexhaustible, poured forth
To feed the spirit of religious love
In which I walked with Nature.²

His spiritual faculties, now quickened into activity, found their chief satisfaction in intimate communion with the indwelling spirit of external things, but in such communion the spiritual faculties were themselves the intermediaries and interpreters.

An auxiliar light
Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
Bestowed new splendour ; the melodious birds,
The fluttering breezes, fountains that run on

¹ "The Prelude," i. 401-424.

² *Ibid.* ii. 353-359.

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Murmuring so sweetly in themselves, obeyed
A like dominion, and the midnight storm
Grew darker in the presence of my eye :
Hence my obeisance, my devotion hence,
And hence my transport.¹

But perhaps the most decisive event in his early spiritual history occurred during that first summer vacation from Cambridge, of which I have already spoken. Though it carries us a little beyond the point actually reached in our story we may most fittingly deal with it here. It was, as will be seen, in the nature of a great awakening to a sense of his destiny and calling. Despite the stir of higher impulses he had allowed himself to be lured away by "heady schemes" and "trivial pleasures." Then came "a particular hour" of uplift and illumination which, as he was fain to believe, exercised a lasting influence over his life. He had been indulging in what to a youth of his austere temper seemed like "giddy revelry" :

'Mid a throng
Of maids and youths, old men, and matrons staid,
A medley of all tempers, I had passed
The night in dancing, gaiety, and mirth,
With din of instruments and shuffling feet,
And glancing forms, and tapers glittering,
And unaimed prattle flying up and down ;
Spirits upon the stretch, and here and there
Slight shocks of young love-liking interspersed,
Whose transient pleasure mounted to the head,
And tingled through the veins.

¹ "The Prelude," ii. 368-376.

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This continued till dawn, for :

Ere we retired,
The cock had crowed, and now the eastern sky
Was kindling, not unseen, from humble copse
And open field, through which the pathway wound,
And homeward led my steps.

Then came the never-to-be-forgotten solitary
walk in the dewy freshness of the dawn :

Magnificent
The morning rose, in memorable pomp,
Glorious as e'er I had beheld—in front,
The sea lay laughing at a distance ; near,
The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,
Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light ;
And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn—
Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,
And labourers going forth to till the fields.
Ah ! need I say, dear Friend ! that to the brim
My heart was full ; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me ; bond unknown to me
Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit.¹

The striking contrast between the noisy scene
just left behind and the glories of sunrise over
mountains, sea, and meadows, might well have
impressed even a less sensitive mind than his.
But for him it was fraught with an unmistakable
and irresistible appeal. This was one of the
formative moments of his life :

¹ "The Prelude," iv. 323-337.

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On I walked

In thankful blessedness, which yet survives.

It is well that we should dwell upon the early growth of Wordsworth's "religious love" of nature for the simple reason that we are here in touch with the essential principles of all his after-life. To that love, as he himself again and again averred, he was primarily indebted for guidance in the time of darkness and peril, for strength in need, for consolation in sorrow, for the deepest happiness he had ever been privileged to enjoy. Let one passage in testimony be here reproduced ; another, even more memorable, will follow presently :

If in my youth I have been pure in heart,
If, mingling with the world, I am content
With my own modest pleasures, and have lived
With God and Nature communing, removed
From little enmities and low desires—
The gift is yours ; if in these times of fear,
This melancholy waste of hopes o'erthrown,
If, 'mid indifference and apathy,
And wicked exultation when good men
On every side fall off, we know not how,
To selfishness, disguised in gentle names
Of peace and quiet and domestic love,
Yet mingled not unwillingly with sneers
On visionary minds ; if, in this time
Of dereliction and dismay, I yet
Despair not of our nature, but retain
A more than Roman confidence, a faith
That fails not, in all sorrow my support,
The blessing of my life—the gift is yours,

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Ye winds and sounding cataracts ! 'tis yours,
Ye mountains ! thine, O Nature ! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations ; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion.¹

III

ON their father's death William and his brothers had passed into the care of two uncles, Richard Wordsworth and Christopher Crackenthorpe. The Wordsworth family had not been left as well off as might have been expected from John Wordsworth's position, for Sir James Lowther, who had some time before borrowed £5000 from him, now refused to repay, and a good deal of the attorney's remaining fortune was wasted in vain efforts to recover the money. In these circumstances the two guardians behaved with commendable generosity ; they provided the funds necessary to keep the boys at Hawkshead, and when the time came sent two of them, William and Christopher, to complete their education at the university.

It was on a dreary morning in October 1787 that Wordsworth entered Cambridge. He was in high spirits and "full of hope." But he soon found that the university was uncongenial to him. Its moral and intellectual atmosphere was dull and uninspiring. The life led by the

¹ "The Prelude," ii. 427-450.

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undergraduates was unprofitable and often worse. The prescribed routine of study was by no means to his taste, and academic distinction "but little sought" by him and "little won." Thrown largely upon himself he found refuge in nature and in his own soul, and began to discover "what independent solaces" were his "to mitigate the injurious sway of place and circumstance." Often leaving behind him "the crowd, buildings, and groves," he would wander alone about the "level fields," missing the mountains to which he had been accustomed, yet still well pleased to peruse "the common countenance of earth and sky";¹ while evening after evening it was his habit, even in the depth of winter, to linger in the "college groves" and "tributary walks," brooding on many things. In books, too, he found cheering companionship, though his "over-love of freedom" prevented him from substituting any "settled plan" of reading for that laid down in the curriculum.² He read the great old English poets :

Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington
I laughed with Chaucer in the hawthorn shade ;
Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales
Of amorous passion. And that gentle Bard,
Chosen by the Muses for their Page of State—
Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven
With the moon's beauty and the moon's soft pace,
I called him Brother, Englishman, and Friend !
Yea, our blind Poet, who in his later day,

¹ "The Prelude," iii. 90 ff.

² *Ibid.* vi. 25 ff.

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Stood almost single ; uttering odious truth—
Darkness before, and danger's voice behind,
Soul awful—if the earth has ever lodged
An awful soul—I seemed to see him here
Familiarly, and in his scholar's dress
Bounding before me, yet a stripling youth—
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
And conscious step of purity and pride.¹

Cervantes and Shakespeare were also added to his list of friends. One entire book of "The Prelude" is devoted to books and their influence, and in it Wordsworth breathes a blessing on all those "inspired souls" whose works "lay their sure foundations in the heart of man," from the Hebrew poets and "Homer the great Thunderer" down to the nameless ballad-singers whose "wren-like warblings" are the delight of "cottagers and spinners at the wheel."

His first college vacation he spent, as we have seen, among his "native hills." The following summer—that of 1789—he visited his grandparents at Penrith, and there met his sister Dorothy, whom he had not seen for nearly four years.² There, too, he found "another maid, who also shed a gladness o'er that season"—his cousin Mary Hutchinson, who years before had been with him at a Dame School in Penrith, but who now first stirred tender feelings which were later to blossom into love. These two holidays were full of happiness. But his spirit was too restless to be satisfied even with such

¹ "The Prelude," iii. 275-292.

² *Ibid.* vi. 195-203.

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unalloyed pleasures as they afforded. He began to crave for wider horizons and a more varied knowledge of life ; and so when the third summer once more brought him freedom, he resolved upon spending it in a walking tour on the Continent. Such an enterprise would not be in the least surprising now. In Wordsworth's youth it was an "unprecedented course," upon which he did not enter without considerable misgivings. But his mind was made up and his plan was duly carried out. "Lightly equipped," says the poetic record—which, being translated into prose, means that each carried a stout stick and had all the "needments" for the journey "tied up in a pocket-handkerchief"—he and his "youthful friend," Robert Jones—"he, too, a mountaineer"—set out "side by side, bound to the distant Alps."

It was a moment of great expectancy among the nations, for the Revolution had brought the promise of a new and glorious era in the unfolding life of man.

Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again.¹

The route which the young travellers had marked out lay through Burgundy, down the Rhone, by way of Savoy to Geneva, Villeneuve, Martigny and Chamounix, across the Alps by the Simplon as far as the Italian lakes, and thence back by Lucerne, Zurich, Schaffhausen,

¹ "The Prelude," vi. 339 341.

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the Rhine and Cologne, and so through Belgium to Calais. They chanced to land in Calais on the 13th July, the eve of the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, and of "that great federal day" when the king was to swear allegiance to the new constitution; and evidences of the wonderful enthusiasm which the Revolution had inspired met them at once on every side, for

there we saw,
In a mean city, and among a few,
How bright a face is worn when joy of one
Is joy for tens of millions.¹

Then, striking south, they took their way through hamlets and towns "gaudy with reliques of that festival"; "songs, garlands, mirth, banners, and happy faces" made their road gay; ² and even in "sequestered villages" they

found benevolence and blessedness
Spread like a fragrance everywhere, when spring
Hath left no corner of the land untouched.

More than once they were witnesses of open-air "dances of liberty," and a little later, while sailing up the Rhone, fell in with a number of delegates returning

From the great spousals newly solemnised
At their chief city, in the sight of Heaven.³

All this was very exhilarating. Yet Words-

¹ "The Prelude," vi. 346-349.

² Sonnet: "Jones! as from Calais southward you and I."

³ "The Prelude," vi. 389-390.

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worth was affected by these and other similar experiences less than might perhaps have been expected. For reasons which he himself will explain presently, nature and the wonders of "the ever-living Universe" interested him far more than political excitement and the awakened hopes of man. "A glorious time, a happy time" indeed it was, when "triumphant looks" were "the common language of all eyes." But

A stripling, scarcely of the household then
Of social life, I looked upon these things
As from a distance ; heard, and saw, and felt,
Was touched, but with no intimate concern.¹

He rather turned from these to the "new delights" which bountiful nature spread round his steps "like sunshine o'er green fields."

IV

WORDSWORTH took his degree in January 1791, and left the university with no settled plans for the future. His relatives wanted him to enter the Church, but this he felt would be a mistake. He shrank from the law, which was also proposed, and though he was conscious of leanings towards the army, a military career was for several reasons out of the question.

In this state of uncertainty he drifted to London, where he spent some months in idleness. He wandered about the streets ; saw all the "sights" ; frequented the theatre ; heard

¹ "The Prelude," vi. 776-779.

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the "brawls of lawyers in their courts"; listened to many sermons, not always to edification; and in the House of Commons was much impressed by the oratory of Burke. Yet save that he was moved to astonishment and grief by the squalor, extravagance, and wickedness of the great metropolis, this brief residence in London influenced him but little. The spirit of nature still haunted him in the city streets,¹ and even amid the most sordid surroundings "the Soul of Beauty and enduring Life vouchsafed her inspiration." Here undoubtedly we have the germ of one of his early poems, "The Reverie of Poor Susan." "This arose," he said, "out of my observations of the affecting music of these birds"—the caged thrushes—"hanging in this way in the London streets during the freshness and stillness of the spring morning," and it crystallizes what must have been a frequent experience with him during his perambulations—the transforming power of a sudden flash of memory and the vision which it brings with it.²

THE REVERIE OF POOR SUSAN

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three
years :

Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

¹ "The Prelude," vii. 765-771.

² This poem was, however, probably written somewhat later, during the short visit which Wordsworth and Dorothy paid to their brother Richard in London, in 1797.

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'Tis a note of enchantment ; what ails her ? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees ;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail ;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven : but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade :
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes !

Still quite at sea regarding his prospects, Wordsworth now determined to return to France, this time, however, not for a brief visit but for a lengthy sojourn. His immediate purpose was the thorough mastery of the French language. But we may surmise that he was in part influenced by growing interest in the French cause.

His "readiest course" to Orleans, which he had selected as his place of residence, lay through Paris, and there he remained a few days, seeking out "each spot of old or recent fame"—"the latter chiefly," as he significantly adds. He listened to debates in the National Assembly and the Hall of the Jacobins, and "saw the Revolutionary Power toss like a ship at anchor, rocked by storms." He wandered through the arcades of the Palais Royal, and "stared and listened" while "hawkers

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and haranguers " and " hissing Factionists with ardent eyes " made " hubbub wild " about him. He made a pilgrimage to the ruins of the Bastille

and from the rubbish gathered up a stone,
And pocketed the relic, in the guise
Of an enthusiast.¹

Yet there was, he confesses, something rather factitious about his emotion, and when he went on to Orleans he was still, in a land which " swarmed with passions " and amid all the violent concussions of the hour, curiously apathetic. Whence this indifference? It was due, he replies, in part to his failure, through want of proper knowledge and insight, to realize the portentous significance of what was taking place; but in part also to the fact that to one of his temper and early training the Revolution at that stage of its development seemed after all very much a matter of course. He understood little indeed about the " nice distinctions then on every tongue, of natural rights and civil "; the " acts of nations and their passing interests " failed to move him; but the great essential principles of liberty, equality, and the brotherhood of man were in his very blood.

For, born in a poor district, and which yet
Retaineth more of ancient homeliness,
Than any other nook of English ground,
It was my fortune scarcely to have seen,
Through the whole tenor of my school-day time,

¹ " The Prelude," ix. 69-71.

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The face of one, who, whether boy or man,
Was vested with attention or respect
Through claims of wealth or blood ; nor was it least
Of many benefits, in later years
Derived from academic institutes
And rules, that they held something up to view
Of a Republic, where all stood thus far
Upon equal ground ; that we were brothers all
In honour, as in one community,
Scholars and gentlemen ; where, furthermore,
Distinction open lay to all that came,
And wealth and titles were in less esteem
Than talents, worth, and prosperous industry.
Add unto this, subservience from the first
To presences of God's mysterious power
Made manifest in Nature's sovereignty,
And fellowship with venerable books,
To sanction the proud workings of the soul,
And mountain liberty. It could not be
But that one tutored thus should look with awe
Upon the faculties of man, receive
Gladly the highest promises, and hail,
As best, the government of equal rights
And individual worth. And hence, O Friend
If at the first great outbreak I rejoiced
Less than might well befit my youth, the cause
In part lay here, that unto me the events
Seemed nothing out of nature's certain course,
A gift that was come rather late than soon.¹

A change of spirit occurred during his sojourn at Orleans and Blois, between which places he passed nearly a year. He now became intimate with " a band of military officers " of strongly

¹ " The Prelude," ix. 215-248.

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anti-revolutionary sentiments, and in his many discussions with them the "zeal, which yet had slumbered, now in opposition burst forth like a Polar summer."¹

Among them too, as it happened, was one "of other mould"—a patriot and a zealous supporter of the popular cause. This was Michel Beaupuy, a man whose noble soul was filled with the high and generous enthusiasm of humanity. Towards the poor and the down-trodden in particular his heart went out in warmest sympathy.

Man he loved
As man ; and, to the mean and the obscure,
And all the homely in their homely works,
Transferred a courtesy which had no air
Of condescension.²

With this fine product and representative of the early revolutionary faith, whose name, he thought, was fully worthy to stand beside "the worthiest of antiquity," Wordsworth formed a close friendship, and together they often canvassed the great problems of government and society. These endless talks exerted a profound influence upon his mind. His "hatred of absolute rule, where will of one is law of all," daily gained stronger hold upon him, and this hatred had for its concomitant an ever-growing love of and pity for "the abject multitude." One day, in the course of their walk, he and Beaupuy happened to meet "a hunger-bitten

¹ "The Prelude," ix. 254-256.

² *Ibid.* ix. 306-310.

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girl " listlessly knitting " with pallid hands " and leading by a cord tied to her arm a heifer which, as it followed, picked a scanty meal from the hedges by the wayside. This concrete example of the misery of the masses of the people touched Beaupuy's tender heart. " 'Tis against that," he exclaimed, " that we are fighting." And Wordsworth shared his faith in the fundamental humanitarianism of the revolutionary cause.

I with him believed
That a benignant spirit was abroad
Which might not be withstood, that poverty
Abject as this would in a little time
Be found no more, that we should see the earth
Unthwarted in her wish to recompense
The meek, the lowly, patient child of toil,
All institutes for ever blotted out
That legalised exclusion, empty pomp
Abolished, sensual state and cruel power
Whether by edict of the one or few ;
And finally, as sum and crown of all,
Should see the people having a strong hand
In framing their own laws ; whence better days
To all mankind.¹

Doubts and ominous forebodings at times disturbed his faith. On his former visit to the Continent he had been troubled by the expulsion of the monks of the Chartreuse.² Now, as he

¹ "The Prelude," ix. 518-532.

² *Ibid.* vi. 420-435. It appears, however, that Wordsworth was in error in supposing that the monks had been expelled. The soldiers whose invasion of their solitude aroused his ire, were only making a "domiciliary visit." See Legouis' "La Jeunesse de Wordsworth."

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wandered along the banks of the Loire, and recalled all the romantic associations of that beautiful region, the violence of his political partisanship was checked for the moment by a vivid sense of the sanctity and charm of the past.¹ But such misgivings were only occasional. Wordsworth was now a "patriot"; his heart was "all given to the people" and his "love was theirs"; and, looking back, he recalls, in a passage of great general as well as personal interest, the splendid visionary enthusiasm of that wonderful era of faith and happiness.

O pleasant exercise of hope and joy !
For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
Upon our side, us who were strong in love !
Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very Heaven ! O times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance !
When Reason seemed the most to assert her rights
When most intent on making of herself
A prime enchantress—to assist the work,
Which then was going forward in her name !
Not favoured spots alone, but the whole Earth,
The beauty wore of promise—that which sets
(As at some moments might not be unfelt
Among the bowers of Paradise itself)
The budding rose above the rose full blown.
What temper at the prospect did not wake
To happiness unthought of ? The inert
Were roused, and lively natures rapt away !
They who had fed their childhood upon dreams,

¹ "The Prelude," ix. 431-501.

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The play-fellows of fancy, who had made
All powers of swiftness, subtilty, and strength
Their ministers,—who in lordly wise had stirred
Among the grandest objects of the sense,
And dealt with whatsoever they found there
As if they had within some lurking right
To wield it ;—they, too, who of gentle mood
Had watched all gentle motions, and to these
Had fitted their own thoughts, schemers more mild,
And in the region of their peaceful selves ;—
Now was it that *both* found, the meek and lofty
Did both find, helpers to their hearts' desire,
And stuff at hand, plastic as they could wish,—
Were called upon to exercise their skill,
Not in Utopia,—subterranean fields,—
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where !
But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where, in the end,
We find our happiness, or not at all ! ¹

Wordsworth returned to Paris—"the fierce metropolis"—in October 1792, a month only after the September massacres. He had now come to believe that the salvation of France depended upon the Girondins, and lamenting their want of a vigorous policy, was on the point, despite the personal dangers to be incurred, of throwing in his lot with them. By this time, however, his relatives at home were becoming seriously alarmed on his own account, and felt it necessary to interfere. In his poetic record he speaks vaguely of having been "dragged" away from France "by a chain of

¹ "The Prelude," xi. 105-145.

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harsh necessity.” The crude fact is that his supplies were now cut off. It was well for Wordsworth and for us that he was thus compelled to return to England, and he himself afterwards acknowledged thankfully that what seemed “harsh necessity” was really “the gracious providence of Heaven.” Had he been allowed his own way, he would almost certainly have perished at the hands of the Jacobins in the general destruction of the Brissotin party.

V

IN England he found conservative opinion running strongly against the Revolution, the defence of which he accordingly undertook in a letter to the Bishop of Llandaff. One argument which he was accustomed to use at this time, to the effect that the abuses which attended the popular upheaval should really be regarded as an evil heritage of the past, he afterwards restated in “The Prelude”:

When a taunt
Was taken up by scoffers in their pride,
Saying, “Behold the harvest that we reap
From popular government and equality,”
I clearly saw that neither these nor aught
Of wild belief engrafted on their names
By false philosophy had caused the woe,
But a terrific reservoir of guilt
And ignorance filled up from age to age,
That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,
But burst and spread in deluge through the land.¹

¹ “The Prelude,” x. 470-480.

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For the moment he thus stood firm in his revolutionary faith. But before long he found himself involved in a fierce struggle of conflicting motives. Pitt's declaration of war against France was a terrible shock to him—the first great shock his moral nature had ever received. He loved his country, yet, convinced that his country was now in the wrong, he felt himself compelled to rejoice when disaster overtook the British arms. Then came the Reign of Terror, which overwhelmed him with despair, and the ghastly thought of which long afterwards continued to torture him by day and to haunt his dreams by night. His hopes revived a little when news came of the fall of Robespierre.¹ But it was only for a brief time. The further course of events in France quickly alienated his sympathies, and when the Republic, still professing to act upon the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, entered upon a policy of military aggression, his "genial feelings" were turned to bitterness. For a time, even though France had failed him, he clung desperately to the abstract political theories behind the revolutionary movement; deeply influenced in this, like many of his contemporaries, by the teachings of that remarkable man, William Godwin, in his "Enquiry concerning Political Justice." But he found little comfort in abstractions amid the wreck of concrete hopes. Little by little he began to recognize that he was on the wrong path. There was

¹ "The Prelude," x. 553-575.

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nothing for it but to start afresh. In a thoroughly Godwinian spirit he determined to "anatomize the frame of social life" and to bring "all precepts, judgments, maxims, creeds" to the bar of reason. As might have been anticipated, the result was only confusion worse confounded. Bewildered and perplexed he now fell into intellectual despair. He had lost his bearings and was completely adrift.

In this great spiritual crisis his salvation—"thanks to the bounteous Giver of all good"—was wrought largely through the influence of his sister. She revived for him "a saving intercourse" with his "true self."¹ Her companionship brought back to him faith and peace. In particular, she restored him to nature, whose beauty and benign power had been forgotten amid all the excitement and strain through which he had lately passed. Even when they were children together his indebtedness to her had been incalculable :

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears ;
And humble cares, and delicate fears ;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears ;
And love, and thought, and joy.²

These gifts she now renewed, and it was mainly through her mediation that "Nature's self" led him back "through opening day" to that perfect trust in the divine ordering of the world which was hereafter to be his solace and stay amid all the vicissitudes of life.

¹ "The Prelude," xi. 333 ff.

² "The Sparrow's Nest."

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Yet though Dorothy's influence was undoubtedly the most powerful personal factor in Wordsworth's restoration to spiritual health, that of Mary Hutchinson must not be forgotten.

She came, no more a phantom to adorn
A moment, but an inmate of the heart,
And yet a spirit, there for me enshrined
To penetrate the lofty and the low ;
Even as one essence of pervading light
Shines, in the brightest of ten thousand stars
And the meek worm that feeds her lonely lamp
Couched in the dewy grass.¹

These lines recall the exquisite little poem which Wordsworth wrote about Mary two years after their marriage :

She was a Phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight ;
A lovely Apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament ;
Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair ;
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair ;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time and the cheerful Dawn ;
A dancing Shape, an Image gay,
To haunt, to startle, and way-lay.

I saw her upon nearer view,
A Spirit, yet a Woman too !
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin-liberty ;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet ;

¹ " The Prelude," xiv. 263-275.

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A Creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food ;
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.

And now I see with eye serene
The very pulse of the machine ;
A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
A Traveller between life and death ;
The reason firm, the temperate will,
Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill ;
A perfect Woman, nobly planned,
To warn, to comfort, and command ;
And yet a Spirit still, and bright
With something of angelic light.

VI

IN February 1794 Wordsworth wrote to a friend : " I have been doing nothing, and still continue to do nothing. What is to become of me I know not." The statement that he had been doing nothing is not strictly correct. He had been doing something—he had made a definite start as a poet with the publication the preceding year of two poems " An Evening Walk " and " Descriptive Sketches." The former deals with the landscape of the familiar region round Hawkshead and Ambleside, though as Wordsworth was careful to note, it was not " confined to a particular walk or an individual place—a proof (of which I was unconscious at the time) of my unwillingness to submit the poetic spirit to the chains of fact

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and mere circumstance.”¹ The latter is composed of scenes from his “pedestrian tour among the Alps with Robert Jones,” to whom it is dedicated. Both poems are in the orthodox “classic” couplet; and in both there is much to remind us of the current poetic style. Such a passage as this, for example, from “An Evening Walk,” is unmistakably reminiscent of Goldsmith:

Far from my dearest Friend, 'tis mine to rove
Through bare grey dell, high wood, and pastoral cove;
Where Derwent rests, and listens to the roar
That stuns the tremulous cliffs of high Lodore;
Where peace to Grasmere's lonely island leads,
To willowy hedge-rows, and to emerald meads;
Leads to her bridge, rude church, and cottaged grounds,
Her rocky sheepwalks, and her woodland bounds;
Where, undisturbed by winds, Winander sleeps
'Mid clustering isles, and holly-sprinkled steeps;
Where twilight glens endear my Esthwaite's shore,
And memory of departed pleasures, more.

It is only when we read these poems more closely that we are able to detect beneath their conventional mannerisms a certain distinctive

¹ It should never be forgotten that, notwithstanding his minute attention to fact, Wordsworth was opposed to anything approaching photographic literalism in descriptive poetry. Aubrey de Vere records a conversation with him in which he emphatically condemned the ultra-realistic method of poets who went to nature with “pencil and notebook, and jotted down whatever struck them most.” Nature, he declared, “does not permit an inventory to be made of her charms.” The poet should leave pencil and notebook at home; and, as he walks, should fix his eye with a reverent attention upon the things about him. Afterwards he would find that he had forgotten much; but “that which remained, the picture surviving in the mind, would have presented the ideal and essential truth of the scene. . . . In every scene many of the most brilliant details are but accidental.”

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and personal quality, particularly in their handling of nature. Both contain a large amount of carefully accumulated detail, while the specific character of the descriptions brings them into sharp contrast with the common class of eighteenth-century landscape verse. This is a point upon which long afterwards Wordsworth himself laid great stress. The eighteenth-century poet had been satisfied as a rule with vague generalizations. He, on the contrary, had endeavoured to "look steadily" at his subject and to reproduce the essential features of what he had seen. Speaking of "An Evening Walk," he said: "There is not an image in it which I have not observed; and now, in my seventy-third year, I recollect the time and place where most of them were noticed." It is such direct and intimate rendering of nature which gives prophetic interest to this otherwise rather imitative early work. Take, for instance, the two lines which he himself picked out as marking a stage in his poetic development:

And, fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs and leaves, in stronger lines.

On casual perusal this couplet may not appear in the least remarkable. Wordsworth's comment brings out its significance. "This is feebly and imperfectly expressed, but I recollect distinctly the very spot where this first struck me. It was on the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure.

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The moment was important in my poetical history, for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country, so far as I was acquainted with them, and I made a resolution to supply, in some degree, the deficiency." Pope, with Walsh's aid, early learned that it was his mission to be a "correct" poet. Wordsworth, prompted by his own native genius, resolved in youth that he would become an interpreter of nature.

These poems attracted no attention, though at Cambridge they were read by Coleridge, who perceived in them the sign of fresh and original power.¹ From the point of view of profit or advancement, therefore, they might just as well have been kept in manuscript. Otherwise his outlook remained absolutely blank. There was thus good reason for his disquietude. He thought for a time of seeking an opening in journalism, and even of starting on his own account a monthly magazine, of mildly republican colour, to be called "The Philanthropist." This, however, was never anything more than a dream. Restless, full of vague longings, but without definite plan or purpose, he continued to lead "an undomestic wanderer's life," partly in London, partly among "rural England's cultivated vales and Cambrian solitudes."² Then suddenly the pressing problem of his future was solved for him. Early in 1795 a young friend, Raisley Calvert, died of

¹ "The Prelude," xiii. 352-365.

² *Ibid.* xiii. 350-354.

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consumption, leaving him a legacy of £900, together with a message that he did so believing that, relieved from immediate anxieties and free to devote himself to literature, Wordsworth might use his powers and attainments for the benefit of mankind. By this thoughtful act his friend "cleared a passage" for him, and allowed the stream of his life to flow "in the bent of nature." Wordsworth was of course deeply moved, and some years later he enshrined his gratitude in the following beautiful sonnet :

TO THE MEMORY OF RAISLEY CALVERT ¹

Calvert ! it must not be unheard by them
Who may respect my name, that I to thee
Owed many years of early liberty.
This care was thine when sickness did condemn
Thy youth to hopeless wasting, root and stem—
That I, if frugal and severe, might stray
Where'er I liked ; and finally array
My temples with the Muse's diadem.
Hence, if in freedom I have loved the truth ;
If there be aught of pure, or good, or great,
In my past verse ; or shall be, in the lays
Of higher mood, which now I meditate ;—
It gladdens me, O worthy, short-lived, Youth !
To think how much of this will be thy praise.

The legacy was not large, but to Wordsworth it spelt independence. He sent at once for Dorothy, and brother and sister, who thereafter were always to live together till the former's death, started joint housekeeping at Racedown

¹ Cp. "The Prelude," xiv. 348-369,

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Lodge, Dorsetshire, among the hills between Crewkerne and Lyme Regis. The place was lent to them, rent-free, by a Mr. Pinney of Bristol, a friend of Basil Montagu, who had known Wordsworth at Cambridge. Montagu also sent his little son to Racedown as Wordsworth's pupil, and this made a welcome addition to their slender income. Altogether, as Dorothy wrote to a friend, they had now between £70 and £80 a year to live on.

They stayed at Racedown nearly two years, leading a life of primitive simplicity, reading, writing, gardening, and taking long walks together amid the beautiful Dorset scenery : "as happy," Dorothy declared, "as human beings can be." This was the period of Wordsworth's recovery from the reaction which had followed upon the collapse of his revolutionary hopes. Through many hours of quiet intercourse with his sister and of solitary communings with nature and his own soul, the confidence he had lost in life's divine purpose and meaning came back to him, and with it peace and joy. In the fourth book of "The Excursion"—"Despondency Corrected"—he speaks at length through the mouth of the Wanderer of the influences which had been most potent in this restoration, and emphasizes in particular the primary importance of that religious faith which he had now regained :

"One adequate support

For the calamities of mortal life

Exists—one only ; an assured belief

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That the procession of our fate, howe'er
Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
Of infinite benevolence and power ;
Whose everlasting purposes embrace
All accidents, converting them to good.
—The darts of anguish *fix* not where the seat
Of suffering hath been thoroughly fortified
By acquiescence in the Will supreme
For time and for eternity ; by faith,
Faith absolute in God, including hope,
And the defence that lies in boundless love
Of his perfections ; with habitual dread
Of aught unworthily conceived, endured
Impatiently, ill-done, or left undone,
To the dishonour of his holy name.
Soul of our Souls, and safeguard of the world !
Sustain, thou only canst, the sick of heart ;
Restore their languid spirits, and recall
Their lost affections unto thee and thine ! ”

During these two years, while he laid up much material for future use, Wordsworth produced but little. But he worked at a tragedy entitled “ The Borderers,” which was later very properly rejected by the managers of Covent Garden as “ not calculated for the stage,” and wrote two narrative poems, “ Guilt and Sorrow ” and “ Margaret, or The Ruined Cottage.” The former, a gloomy tale told in Spenserian stanzas, is chiefly interesting because, like a great deal of other literature inspired by the humanitarian spirit of the revolutionary age, it treats of the wrongs suffered by the poor at the hands of constituted society. The latter, which was afterwards incorporated in the open-

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ing book of "The Excursion," is the first piece of work done by Wordsworth which gave any clear indication of his characteristic powers.

The beginning of his friendship with Coleridge dates from this time. That brilliant genius and weak-willed dreamer had already commenced his fatal course of drifting, and now drifted to Racedown, the inmates of which he took by storm. Dorothy instantly discovered that he was "a wonderful man." At first indeed she thought him plain, with his pale face, wide mouth, flabby lips, indifferent teeth, and "longish, loose-flowing, half-curling, rough black hair." But the moment he began to talk his expression changed, his grey eyes lighted up with celestial fire, and all his physical peculiarities were forgotten under the magic of his eloquence. He and Wordsworth quickly found that they were brothers in spirit, and at once began to exchange confidences. "The first thing that was read after he came," Dorothy tells us, "was William's new poem, 'Ruined Cottage,' with which he was much delighted; and after tea he repeated to us two acts and a half of his tragedy, 'Osorio.' The next morning William read his tragedy 'The Borderers'—which, it is surprising to learn, Coleridge compared favourably with the work of Shakespeare.¹ Thus a new influence was introduced into Wordsworth's life which, according to his own statement, was second only to that of his sister.

¹ See his letter to Cottle, June 1797, in "Letters of Coleridge," 1221.

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VII

IN July 1797 the Wordsworths paid a visit to Coleridge, who was then living at Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, and finding a furnished house vacant in the Quantock Hills, about three miles away, they took it at once for the pleasure of being near their friend. Alfoxden, as the house was called, was a large country mansion, with extensive gardens, stables, and furniture enough for a dozen families ; yet, lest it should be supposed that such an establishment was as much beyond their means as it was admittedly in excess of their requirements, let it here be put on record that they obtained it at the fabulous rental of £23 a year, free of rates and taxes ! There they remained till June 1798. The country round about was an unfailing source of delight to them : " there is everything here," Dorothy wrote, " sea, woods as wild as fancy ever painted, brooks clear and pebbly as in Cumberland, villages so romantic." Amid such surroundings they could not fail to be happy. Two short poems belonging to the early months of 1798 are redolent of the charm of the neighbourhood and of Wordsworth's own quiet joy in all its details. The first, " composed in front of Alfoxden House " and addressed to Dorothy, is a call to the open : the " Edward " of the verses, by whom they were sent, being the little son of Basil Montagu.

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TO MY SISTER

It is the first mild day of March :
Each minute sweeter than before,
The redbreast sings from the tall larch
That stands beside our door.

There is a blessing in the air,
Which seems a sense of joy to yield
To the bare trees, and mountains bare,
And grass in the green field.

My sister ! ('tis a wish of mine)
Now that our morning meal is done,
Make haste, your morning task resign ;
Come forth and feel the sun.

Edward will come with you ;—and, pray,
Put on with speed your woodland dress ;
And bring no book : for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

No joyless forms shall regulate
Our living calendar :
We from to-day, my Friend, will date
The opening of the year.

Love, now a universal birth,
From heart to heart is stealing,
From earth to man, from man to earth :
—It is the hour of feeling.

One moment now may give us more
Than years of toiling reason :
Our minds shall drink at every pore
The spirit of the season.

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Some silent laws our hearts will make,
Which they shall long obey :
We for the year to come may take
Our temper from to-day.

And from the blessed power that rolls
About, below, above,
We'll frame the measure of our souls :
They shall be tuned to love.

Then come, my Sister ! come, I pray,
With speed put on your woodland dress ;
And bring no book : for this one day
We'll give to idleness.

The second poem is not marked by the same abandonment of mind. The poet, brooding in solitude, is touched by the thought of the sufferings of humanity, and the note of sadness steals in as he contrasts " Nature's holy plan " with " what man has made of man." It was " actually composed " while he " was sitting by the side of the brook that runs . . . through the grounds of Alfoxden." This Alfoxden dell, he says, was one of his chosen resorts. It was a chosen resort also of Coleridge, who describes it in his poem, " This Lime Tree Bower my Prison," written while Charles Lamb was on a visit to Nether Stowey.

LINES WRITTEN IN EARLY SPRING

I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

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To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran ;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths ;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure :—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air ;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man ?

Coleridge's society, which, as Dorothy said, had been the "principal inducement" to the settlement at Alfoxden, proved a great stimulus to Wordsworth's genius during the eleven memorable months of their residence there. "We are," Coleridge declared, "three people with only one soul"—it is a pity that the spiritual brotherhood was not a quartette instead of a trio ; but poor Mrs. Coleridge did not seem to count. In their long walks together over

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hill and through wood, and in their many happy days of companionship, now at Alfoxden and now at Stowey, the talk of the two young men ran incessantly upon poetry, and many big plans of work were discussed which were destined to come to nothing : Coleridge, then as always, being specially fertile in schemes which were never to be carried out. One enterprise, however, arose out of their intercourse which, though apparently not in the least big, was fraught with immense consequences for literature. This was the production of the slender volume entitled " Lyrical Ballads," the publication of which is rightly regarded as opening a new chapter in the history of English poetry.

The origin of " Lyrical Ballads " is described by Coleridge in a passage which, well known as it is, must here be quoted once again.

During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination. . . . The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural ; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. . . . For the

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second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life ; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves.

In this idea originated the plan of the "Lyrical Ballads," in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention to the lethargy of custom and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us : an inexhaustible treasure, but for which, in consequence of the film of familiarity and selfish solicitude, we have eyes, yet see not, ears that hear not, and hearts that neither feel nor understand.¹

This passage enables us to appreciate the epoch-making character of the little book. It marks the culmination and the confluence of two tendencies which had been growing side by side during the later eighteenth century : the tendency towards romance, on the one hand, and, on the other, that towards naturalism, or simplicity in theme and treatment. With Coleridge's own contribution to the joint under-

¹ "Biographia Literaria, chap. xiv.

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taking we have now nothing to do. Our concern is with Wordsworth's share, and particularly, for the moment, with such poems as "The Idiot Boy," "We are Seven," "The Thorn," and "Goody Blake and Harry Gill," which were designed as experiments in the poetical rendering of subjects hitherto deemed beneath the dignity of the muse.

"The principal object, then, proposed in these poems," Wordsworth wrote two years later, "was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language actually used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect"; and he goes on to explain that "humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, and are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from these elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men

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are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature." ¹

In this remarkable declaration of faith there are many matters worthy of attention. I will here touch upon two only.

The first is the emphasis thrown upon the elementary character of the subjects dealt with. Whether Wordsworth was right or wrong in contending that essential humanity flourishes more fully in the country than in the city, and among the humble classes than in circles of greater refinement and culture, we need not now consider. The point to seize is, his desire to penetrate through the artificial trappings and transitory interests of civilization to that which is common to men as men and belongs to the permanent foundations of human life.

Then, secondly, there is his determination to bring the language of poetry back to naturalness and simplicity. Here he is in open revolt against the fashionable practice of the followers of the Augustan school, with their conventional mannerisms, their pompous circumlocutions, "their gaudiness and inane phraseology." In his attack upon the stereotyped formalism and empty rhetoric by which English poetry had long been vitiated Wordsworth obviously carried reaction a great deal too far. Poetry, according to his theory, should be written, as far as possible (it is unfortunate that he did not attempt to measure the saving grace of this

¹ Preface to second edition of "Lyrical Ballads," 1800. Cp. "The Excursion," i. 343-347.

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qualification), in the simplest language of ordinary rustic folk—or, to be exact, in a selection of such language. It was, we must suppose, in the pursuit of this theory, unchecked by any sense of humour, that he was led to perpetrate those deplorable puerilities which gave the unregenerate occasion to scoff ; as when he wrote of “ Simon Lee ” :

For still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell ;

and of Poor Betty :

This piteous news so much it shocked her,
She quite forgot to send the doctor
To comfort poor old Susan Gale.

Theory, too, must be held responsible for the dreadful ineptitude of “ We are Seven,” for the “ Idiot Boy,” for “ The Thorn,” for “ Goody Blake and Harry Gill ” :

Oh ! what's the matter ? what's the matter ?
What is't that ails young Harry Gill ?
That evermore his teeth they chatter,
Chatter, chatter, chatter still !
Of waistcoats Harry has no lack,
Good duffle grey, and flannel fine ;
He has a blanket on his back,
And coats enough to smother nine.

In March, December, and in July,
'Tis all the same with Harry Gill ;
The neighbours tell, and tell you truly,
His teeth they chatter, chatter still.

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At night, at morning, and at noon,
'Tis all the same with Harry Gill ;
Beneath the sun, beneath the moon,
His teeth they chatter, chatter still !

Young Harry was a lusty drover,
And who so stout of limb as he ?
His cheeks were red as ruddy clover ;
His voice was like the voice of three.
Old Goody Blake was old and poor ;
Ill fed she was, and thinly clad ;
And any man who passed her door
Might see how poor a hut she had.

All day she spun in her poor dwelling :
And then her three hours' work at night,
Alas ! 'twas hardly worth the telling,
It would not pay for candle-light.
Remote from sheltered village-green,
On a hill's northern side she dwelt,
Where from sea-blasts the hawthorns lean,
And hoary dews are slow to melt.

By the same fire to boil their pottage,
Two poor old Dames, as I have known,
Will often live in one small cottage ;
But she, poor Woman ! housed alone.
'Twas well enough when summer came,
The long, warm, lightsome summer-day,
Then at her door the *canty* Dame
Would sit, as any linnet, gay.

But when the ice our streams did fether,
Oh then how her old bones would shake !
You would have said, if you had met her,
'Twas a hard time for Goody Blake.

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Her evenings then were dull and dead :
Sad case it was, as you may think,
For very cold to go to bed ;
And then for cold not sleep a wink.

O joy for her ! whene'er in winter
The winds at night had made a rout ;
And scattered many a lusty splinter
And many a rotten bough about.
Yet never had she, well or sick,
As every man who knew her says,
A pile beforehand, turf or stick,
Enough to warm her for three days.

Such flat and trivial writing as this may of course be held to represent the abuse of Wordsworth's doctrine. But as Coleridge conclusively showed in his masterly inquiry into the whole subject, that doctrine itself is radically unsound ; since the language of poetry can never be identical with that of actual life in Wordsworth's narrow acceptance of the phrase, nor, certainly, is the best language for poetic purposes to be found on the lips of unlettered rustics.¹ Hence it is fortunate that, save in a few poems which were written expressly to illustrate but which in fact disproved them, formulated theories had little influence upon his own production. It is not by reference to his doctrine, as Mr. Myers has said, that the merits of his poetry are to be explained. Indeed we may go farther than this. Wordsworth often

¹ "Biographia Literaria," chap. xvii. Coleridge was quite right in protesting against Wordsworth's critical phraseology as "equivocal."

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wrote superbly ; and he often wrote in a stiff, heavy, pedestrian style. But neither in the one case nor in the other had doctrine anything to do with the quality of his work.

That doctrine is none the less of great importance on both historic and personal grounds. Apart from the fact that it helped to break down a vicious tradition and to reassert the claims of simplicity and truth, it is particularly noteworthy because, like the closely connected theory of the proper subject-matter of poetry, it brings into prominence the essentially democratic character of Wordsworth's genius and aims. He had by this time rejected root and branch his early revolutionary creed, and reaction against that creed was presently to carry him, as we shall see in due course, to extreme conservatism. Yet his work still remains a part of the great revolutionary movement of the age. That movement was inspired by men's growing impatience of artifice, convention, and shams, by a desire to get "back to nature"—to fact and reality—and by an ever-widening sense of the value of that fundamental manhood which underlies all class distinctions and is one and the same in lettered and unlettered, in peer and ploughman. When Wordsworth declared that his chosen theme was to be "no other than the very heart of man" and "men as they are men within themselves,"¹ when he sought his types of strong and noble character in the Cumberland shepherd, the

¹ "The Prelude," xiii. 231 ff.

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pedlar, the leech-gatherer, he stood out as the poetic interpreter of the new democratic faith. When he conceived it as his chief mission, following the lead of nature herself, to consecrate common things and "breathe grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life,"¹ it was of this democratic faith that he was the mouthpiece and apostle. The tender feeling which overflowed from man to the lower animals, and moved him to think of the slain hart as part of the great brotherhood of God's creatures, was another aspect of the same faith.

Grey-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well ;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine :
This Beast not unobserved by Nature fell ;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being, that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust :—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom ;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known ;
But at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

¹ "The Prelude," xiii. 279 ff.

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One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals ;
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.¹

So again with his extravagant theories of poetic style. The language of poetry had long been the language of a caste. In his heroic attempt to break down the barriers of so-called art and to make poetry speak once more with the tongue of common men, the democratic inspiration is once more apparent.

VIII

ON June 26, 1798, the Wordsworths left Alfoxden, and after a short stay in Bristol, where their friend Joseph Cottle, the publisher, was busy with the "Lyrical Ballads," they set out on a walking tour along the banks of the Wye. That tour is memorable because it produced one of the greatest of Wordsworth's poems, the

LINES

COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY, ON
REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR.

JULY 13, 1798

Five years have past ; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters ! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,

¹ "Hart-Leap Well."

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That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion ; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild : these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door ; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees !
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye :
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart ;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration : feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure : such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime ; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight

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Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened :—that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul :
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

If this
Be but a vain belief, yet, oh ! how oft—
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight ; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye ! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee !

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again :
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when
first

I came among these hills ; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led : more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then

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(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.—I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur ; other gifts
Have followed ; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man ;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains ; and of all that we behold
From this green earth ; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, both what they half create,
And what perceive ; well pleased to recognise

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In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay :
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river ; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend ; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
My former pleasures in the shooting lights
Of thy wild eyes. Oh ! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister ! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her ; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy : for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk ;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee : and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure ; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place

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For all sweet sounds and harmonies ; oh ! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations ! Nor, perchance—
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together ; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service : rather say
With warmer love—oh ! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake !

With this wonderful poem before us we may conveniently pause in our story to return to a subject already opened up—Wordsworth's interpretation of nature.

It is important first of all to recall and still further to specify the change which came over his relations with nature as his knowledge of life deepened and the "mellow years" brought him "the philosophic mind." Three stages in the growth of his love of nature are, as will be observed, marked out in the foregoing lines, which indeed state briefly what is set forth at much greater length in "The Prelude." First came, as we have already seen, the stage in which the love of nature was, as I put it,

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simply a healthy boy's delight in freedom and the open air. Then followed that intermediate period in which the sensuous beauty of nature was loved with an unreflecting passion altogether untouched by intellectual interests or associations—the kind of passion which found such full expression in the poetry of Keats.¹ Yet even this stage proved to be one of transition only. He passed beyond it, finding “abundant recompense” for whatever he may have lost by the way, into a mood of mind in which his love became profoundly religious in character. Here it is that we reach the distinctive quality in Wordsworth's nature poetry. Ardent devotion to natural beauty ; keenness of observation ; unfailing accuracy in the rendering of even the minutest details : these of course are important elements in his work. But they are not the most important. The essentially Wordsworthian feature of his treatment of nature is his intense spirituality.

We must not, however, suppose that though the “aching joys” and “dizzy raptures” of former years were now “no more,” this intense spirituality was destructive of his simple delight in nature as nature. Aubrey de Vere has said that Wordsworth looked at nature as the mystic of old perused the page of Holy Writ, making little of the letter, but passing through it to the spiritual interpretation.² The state-

¹ Cp. my “Keats and his Poetry,” in this series, pp. 35, 36.

² “On the Personal Character of Wordsworth's Poetry,” in “Wordsworthiana,” p. 147.

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ment is rather misleading. It cannot surely be maintained that Wordsworth made little of the letter. If the primrose by the river's brim was for him the symbol and index of divine things, it did not therefore cease to be the primrose. The spiritual meaning was added to the natural beauty, not substituted for it. As an expression of pure delight in such natural beauty the following verses could not easily be surpassed by any poet :

“ I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD ”

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils ;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay :
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced ; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee :
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company :
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought :

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For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye¹
Which is the bliss of solitude ; }
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

At the same time Aubrey de Vere is right in speaking of Wordsworth as a mystic, and his mysticism is such a fundamental and pervading element in his thought that it must be considered very carefully. Thoroughly anti-scientific and anti-rationalistic in temper, he was in radical opposition to all forms of philosophy which assume that the intellect is the only organ of truth. This is brought out clearly, for instance, in

A POET'S EPITAPH

Art thou a Statist in the van
Of public conflicts trained and bred ?
—First learn to love one living man ;
Then may'st thou think upon the dead.

A Lawyer art thou ?—draw not nigh !
Go, carry to some fitter place
The keenness of that practised eye,
The hardness of that sallow face.

Art thou a Man of purple cheer ?
A rosy Man, right plump to see ?
Approach ; yet, Doctor, not too near,
This grave no cushion is for thee.

¹ According to Wordsworth's own statement these two lines were contributed by his wife.

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Or art thou one of gallant pride,
A Soldier and no man of chaff ?
Welcome !—but lay thy sword aside,
And lean upon a peasant's staff.

Physician art thou ? one, all eyes,
Philosopher ! a fingering slave,
One that would peep and botanise
Upon his mother's grave ?

Wrapt closely in thy sensual fleece,
O turn aside,—and take, I pray,
That he below may rest in peace,
Thy ever-dwindling soul, away !

A Moralist perchance appears ;
Led, Heaven knows how ! to this poor sod :
And he has neither eyes nor ears ;
Himself his world, and his own God ;

One to whose smooth-rubbed soul can cling
Nor form, nor feeling, great or small ;
A reasoning, self-sufficing thing,
An intellectual All-in-all !

Shut close the door ; press down the latch ;
Sleep in thy intellectual crust ;
Nor lose ten tickings of thy watch
Near this unprofitable dust.

But who is He, with modest looks,
And clad in homely russet brown ?
He murmurs near the running brooks
A music sweeter than their own.

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He is retired as noontide dew,
Or fountain in a noon-day grove ;
And you must love him, ere to you
He will seem worthy of your love.

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.

In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart,—
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

But he is weak ; both Man and Boy,
Hath been an idler in the land ;
Contented if he might enjoy
The things which others understand.

—Come hither in thy hour of strength ;
Come, weak as is a breaking wave !
Here stretch thy body at full length ;
Or build thy house upon this grave.

Thus there was for Wordsworth a world of divine reality behind and within the ordinary world of observation and experience—a world to which mere reason would never give access, but which was nevertheless open to the spiritual faculty in man. Hints from this world come to us from beyond the regions of time and sense.

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YES, IT WAS THE MOUNTAIN ECHO

Yes, it was the mountain Echo,
Solitary, clear, profound,
Answering to the shouting Cuckoo,
Giving to her sound for sound !

Unsolicited reply
To a babbling wanderer sent ;
Like her ordinary cry,
Like—but oh, how different !

Hears not also mortal Life ?
Hear not we, unthinking Creatures !
Slaves of folly, love, or strife—
Voices of two different natures ?

Have not *we* too ?—yes, we have
Answers, and we know not whence ;
Echoes from beyond the grave,
Recognised intelligence !

Such rebounds our inward ear
Catches sometimes from afar—
Listen, ponder, hold them dear ;
For of God,—of God they are.

With these simple, yet pregnant, lines we may compare the more elaborate statement of the same thought in the following passage from the fourth book of “The Excursion.” The argument, as such, is of course invalidated by the fact that its basis is a mere illusion. But this for the moment does not matter.

I have seen

A curious child, who dwelt upon a tract
Of inland ground, applying to his ear

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The convolutions of a smooth-lipped shell ;
To which, in silence hushed, his very soul
Listened intensely ; and his countenance soon
Brightened with joy ; for from within were heard
Murmurings, whereby the monitor expressed
Mysterious union with its native sea.
Even such a shell the universe itself
Is to the ear of Faith ; and there are times,
I doubt not, when to you it doth impart
Authentic tidings of invisible things ;
Of ebb and flow, and ever-during power ;
And central peace, subsisting at the heart
Of endless agitation. Here you stand,
Adore, and worship, when you know it not ;
Pious beyond the intention of your thought ;
Devout above the meaning of your will.

Now for Wordsworth it is because of the essential kinship between the spiritual faculty in man and the indwelling soul of the universe—because “ the external World ” and the Mind are “ exquisitely ” fitted each to the other¹—that communion with nature is possible, and that through such communion we find, as Mr. Myers has put it, “ an opening, if indeed there be any opening, into the transcendent world.” To grasp this point is to have the key to Wordsworth’s entire interpretation of nature ; to miss it, is to miss everything that is most characteristic in that interpretation. But, as it is further necessary to realize, spiritual communion with nature is possible only on condition

¹ “ The Excursion,” Introduction, 62-71.

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that we go to nature in the right mood—the mood, not of analysis and speculation, but of receptivity and deep religious contemplation. This is the “serene and blessed mood” of the Tintern Abbey “Lines”—the mood of mystical rapture in which the burden of thought is lifted from us and the power is granted to us to see into the very “life of things.” One moment of such inner illumination, as we have already found the poet telling his sister, “may give us more than years of toiling reason.”

We are now prepared to understand Wordsworth’s famous thesis that nature is the best and truest of all teachers. This thesis fills a very large place in his poetry. It is succinctly and clearly set forth in two short poems, first published among the “Lyrical Ballads.” Note should be taken of the stress once again laid upon the initial need of a right relationship with nature in our intercourse with her—of “a wise passiveness” in the one poem, and of “a heart that watches and receives” in the other.

EXPOSTULATION AND REPLY

“Why, William, on that old grey stone,
Thus for the length of half a day,
Why, William, sit you thus alone,
And dream your time away?

“Where are your books?—that light bequeathed
To Beings else forlorn and blind!
Up! up! and drink the spirit breathed
From dead men to their kind.

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“ You look round on your Mother Earth,
As if she for no purpose bore you ;
As if you were her first-born birth,
And none had lived before you ! ”

One morning thus, by Esthwaite lake,
When life was sweet, I knew not why,
To me my good friend Matthew spake,
And thus I made reply :

“ The eye—it cannot choose but see ;
We cannot bid the ear be still ;
Our bodies feel, where'er they be,
Against or with our will.

“ Nor less I deem that there are Powers
Which of themselves our minds impress ;
That we can feed this mind of ours
In a wise passiveness.

“ Think you, 'mid all this mighty sum
Of things for ever speaking,
That nothing of itself will come,
But we must still be seeking ?

“—Then ask not wherefore, here, alone,
Conversing as I may,
I sit upon this old grey stone,
And dream my time away.”

THE TABLES TURNED

Up ! up ! my Friend, and quit your books ;
Or surely you'll grow double :
Up ! up ! my Friend, and clear your looks ;
Why all this toil and trouble ?

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

The sun, above the mountain's head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books ! 'tis a dull and endless strife :
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music ! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it.

And hark ! how blithe the throstle sings !
He, too, is no mean preacher :
Come forth into the light of things,
Let Nature be your teacher.

She has a world of ready wealth,
Our minds and hearts to bless—
Spontaneous wisdom breathed by health,
Truth breathed by cheerfulness.

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings ;
Our meddling intellect
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things :—
We murder to dissect.

Enough of Science and of Art ;
Close up those barren leaves ;
Come forth, and bring with you a heart
That watches and receives.

These poems undoubtedly contain high doctrine, and critics have not been wanting who

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have accused Wordsworth of talking extravagance if not downright nonsense in them. Thus even Lord Morley dismisses impatiently the particular philosophy of which they are the vehicle : " no impulse from a vernal wood," he declares, " can teach us anything at all of moral evil and of good." But before we charge Wordsworth with absurdity it will be well to make sure that we really understand his position. Though his recoil from mere bookishness manifestly prompted him to a too emphatic and over-fanciful expression, I do not think he meant that nature teaches better than books the things which books teach. He meant that if we go to nature in the right mood, and throw ourselves open to her benign influences, we shall gain through communion with her more moral energy and more spiritual insight than we can ever get from all the philosophies of the schools, and that through such energy and insight we shall obtain a clearer vision of good and evil than mere knowledge will ever afford. This indeed may not correspond with the experience of the average man. But it did correspond with Wordsworth's, and for that reason we must at least treat it with respect.

There is, however, another criticism which may more justly be made upon Wordsworth's nature-poetry. It is that the view of nature which he presents is uniformly one-sided. Nature in his interpretation is always benignant. He dwells invariably upon its beauty, its harmony, its peace. Of its indifference and cruelty

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he sees nothing. "All which we behold" is for him "full of blessings." Nature never brings to him, as it brought to Tennyson, "evil dreams"; he never realizes that it is "red in tooth and claw with ravine." This incompleteness of vision is at times a perverting factor in his thought, for it leads him to a false judgment of the relationship of nature and humanity; as when, in a poem recently quoted, he finds in "Nature's holy plan"—a plan which from the minutest beginnings of life upward throughout its entire scale involves wholesale and endless destruction—a condemnation of the barbarities of man. In our reading of Wordsworth allowance must always be made for the fallacy which thus runs through much of his poetry. Yet that fallacy itself throws a wonderful light upon his character. Nature is to us what we are to nature.

O Lady ! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live :
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud !
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah ! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element !¹

Byron, being Byron, saw nature in the tumult

¹ Coleridge : "Ode to Dejection."

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of revolt. Wordsworth, being Wordsworth, found in nature what he sought—the peace which was in his own soul.

IX

ON September 14, 1798, a few days after the publication of "Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth, Dorothy, and Coleridge left London for Germany; Mrs. Coleridge being left behind at Nether Stowey. At Hamburg, where they met Klopstock, they passed some time pleasantly enough. Then they parted company; Coleridge going on to Ratzeburg, where amongst other things he proposed to collect materials for a life of Lessing (never of course to be written or even begun); the Wordsworths settling in "the romantic imperial town of Goslar," where they took lodgings over a draper's shop. There they remained till the spring of 1799, but their visit, to which they had looked forward with the keenest pleasure, proved a great disappointment. Goslar was desperately dull; they had little society and made few acquaintances; living was much dearer than they had anticipated; and the winter was of such exceptional severity that the people of the house fully expected the poet to be frozen to death in his unceiled bedroom.¹ It was on the whole a dreary time for both of them. But Wordsworth was not inactive, though it is significant that he was

¹ See the lines "Written in Germany on One of the Coldest Days of the Century."

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generally inspired by reminiscence (as in "Nutting," which belongs to this period), and not by the life about him. He now began "The Prelude" and wrote two very distinctive narrative poems, "Lucy Gray" and "Ruth." Regarding the former, which I shall here quote, Wordsworth said: "The way in which the incident was treated and the spiritualizing of the character might furnish hints for contrasting the imaginative influences which I have endeavoured to throw over common life with Crabbe's matter-of-fact style of treating subjects of the same kind." It must always be remembered that it was part of Wordsworth's aim to deal faithfully with reality without allowing fidelity to pass into the hard literalism of Crabbe. The passage previously quoted from the preface to the second edition of "Lyrical Ballads," with its reference to the "colouring of imagination" which he sought to throw over his themes, has already made this clear; while Coleridge's account of the "Lyrical Ballads" touches, it will be remembered, upon the same point.

LUCY GRAY

Oft I had heard of Lucy Gray:
And, when I crossed the wild,
I chanced to see at break of day
The solitary child.

No mate, no comrade Lucy knew;
She dwelt on a wide moor,
—The sweetest thing that ever grew
Beside a human door!

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You yet may spy the fawn at play,
The hare upon the green ;
But the sweet face of Lucy Gray
Will never more be seen.

“ To-night will be a stormy night—
You to the town must go ;
And take a lantern, Child, to light
Your mother through the snow.”

“ That, Father ! will I gladly do :
'Tis scarcely afternoon—
The minster-clock has just struck two,
And yonder is the moon ! ”

At this the Father raised his hook,
And snapped a faggot-band ;
He plied his work ;—and Lucy took
The lantern in her hand.

Not blither is the mountain roe :
With many a wanton stroke
Her feet disperse the powdery snow,
That rises up like smoke.

The storm came on before its time :
She wandered up and down ;
And many a hill did Lucy climb :
But never reached the town.

The wretched parents all that night
Went shouting far and wide ;
But there was neither sound nor sight
To serve them for a guide.

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At day-break on a hill they stood
That overlooked the moor ;
And thence they saw the bridge of wood,
A furlong from their door.

They wept—and, turning homeward, cried,
“ In heaven we all shall meet ; ”
—When in the snow the mother spied
The print of Lucy's feet.

Then downwards from the steep hill's edge
They tracked the footmarks small ;
And through the broken hawthorn hedge,
And by the long stone-wall ;

And then an open field they crossed :
The marks were still the same ;
They tracked them on, nor ever lost ;
And to the bridge they came.

They followed from the snowy bank
Those footmarks, one by one,
Into the middle of the plank ;
And further there were none !

—Yet some maintain that to this day
She is a living child ;
That you may see sweet Lucy Gray
Upon the lonesome wild.

O'er rough and smooth she trips along,
And never looks behind ;
And sings a solitary song
That whistles in the wind.

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To this Goslar period also belongs the group of exquisite lyrics, written early in 1799, which we know collectively as the "Lucy" poems. The genesis of these poems remains a mystery. Habitually garrulous about everything connected with his work, Wordsworth has told us nothing about these, except that they were composed in Germany, and one of them—"Three years she grew"—in the Harz Forest. Nor is information regarding them forthcoming from any other quarter. Are they perhaps the memorial, as the poet's curious reticence might seem to hint, of an episode which he chose to keep secret? Or were the emotional experiences portrayed merely fictitious? Was there ever any original of Lucy? Or was she only the creature of a tender fancy? To these questions there is no certain answer. This much alone is beyond dispute, that they have a delicate fragrance which is peculiarly their own, and a note of passion which makes them unique among Wordsworth's works. Their own restraint is of course remarkable, and the note of passion in them is manifestly very subdued. Yet it is in reading them, perhaps, that we can best understand a surprising remark which the poet once made to Aubrey de Vere. Asked by that friend why he had not written more love-poems, he replied: "Had I been a writer of love-poetry it would have been natural to me to write it with a degree of warmth which could hardly have been approved by my principles."

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Strange fits of passion have I known :
And I will dare to tell,
But in the Lover's ear alone,
What once to me befell.

When she I loved looked every day
Fresh as a rose in June,
I to her cottage bent my way,
Beneath an evening-moon.

Upon the moon I fixed my eye,
All over the wide lea ;
With quickening pace my horse drew nigh
Those paths so dear to me.

And now we reached the orchard-plot ;
And, as we climbed the hill,
The sinking moon to Lucy's cot
Came near, and nearer still.

In one of those sweet dreams I slept,
Kind Nature's gentlest boon !
And all the while my eyes I kept
On the descending moon.

My horse moved on ; hoof after hoof
He raised, and never stopped :
When down behind the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped.

What fond and wayward thoughts will slide
Into a Lover's head !
" O mercy ! " to myself I cried,
" If Lucy should be dead ! "

. . .

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She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love :

A violet by a mossy stone
Half hidden from the eye !
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be ;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me !

I travelled among unknown men,
In lands beyond the sea ;
Nor, England ! did I know till then
What love I bore to thee.

'Tis past, that melancholy dream !
Nor will I quit thy shore
A second time ; for still I seem
To love thee more and more.

Among thy mountains did I feel
The joy of my desire ;
And she I cherished turned her wheel
Beside an English fire.

Thy mornings showed, thy nights concealed
The bowers where Lucy played ;
And thine too is the last green field
That Lucy's eyes surveyed.

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Three years she grew in sun and shower,
Then Nature said, " A lovelier flower
On earth was never sown ;
This Child I to myself will take ;
She shall be mine, and I will make
A Lady of my own.

" Myself will to my darling be
Both law and impulse : and with me
The Girl, in rock and plain,
In earth and heaven, in glade and bower,
Shall feel an overseeing power
To kindle or restrain.

" She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn,
Or up the mountain springs ;
And her's shall be the breathing balm,
And her's the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

" The floating clouds their state shall lend
To her ; for her the willow bend ;
Nor shall she fail to see
Even in the motions of the Storm
Grace that shall mould the Maiden's form
By silent sympathy.

" The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her ; and she shall lean her ear
In many a secret place
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.

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“ And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell ;
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.”

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—
How soon my Lucy's race was run !
She died, and left to me
This heath, this calm, and quiet scene ;
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

A slumber did my spirit seal ;
I had no human fears :
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force ;
She neither hears nor sees ;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

Returning to England in April, brother and sister spent some time in a round of visits to relatives. Then in September, Coleridge, now back from Germany, and as erratic as ever, joined Wordsworth and his sailor-brother John in a tour of the Lakes. During that tour Wordsworth saw at Town-End, Grasmere, a vacant cottage which took his fancy. Arrangements for tenancy were soon completed, and he and Dorothy entered into possession of their

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new home on December 20, 1799. He has described their arrival in the hard winter weather :

Stern was the face of nature ; we rejoiced
In that stern countenance, for our souls thence drew
A feeling of their strength. The naked trees,
The icy brooks, as on we passed, appeared
To question us. " Whence come ye, to what end ? "
They seemed to say, " What would ye," said the shower,
" Wild Wanderers, whither through my dark do-
main ? "

The sunbeam said, " Be happy." When this vale
We entered, bright and solemn was the sky
That faced us with a passionate welcoming,
And led us to our threshold. Daylight failed
Insensibly, and round us gently fell
Composing darkness, with a quiet load
Of full contentment, in a little shed
Disturbed, uneasy in itself as seemed,
And wondering at its new inhabitants.
It loves us now, this Vale so beautiful
Begins to love us ! by a sullen storm,
Two months unwearied of severest storm,
It put the temper of our minds to proof,
And found us faithful through the gloom, and heard
The poet mutter his prelusive songs
With cheerful heart, an unknown voice of joy
Among the silence of the woods and hills.¹

Dove Cottage, as their dwelling was called, stands close to the road, with a garden and orchard at the back, and behind these a steep hill. A little " semi-vestibule " opens directly

¹ " The Recluse,"

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on the living-room, which De Quincey described as "an oblong square, not above eight and a half feet high, sixteen feet long, and twelve broad ; very prettily wainscoted from the floor to the ceiling with dark polished oak, slightly embellished with carving. One window there was—a perfect and unpretending cottage window, with little diamond panes, embowered at every season of the year with roses ; and in the summer and autumn with a profusion of jasmine and other fragrant shrubs. From the exuberant luxuriance of the vegetation around it, and from the dark hue of the wainscoting, this window, though tolerably large, did not furnish a very powerful light." On the ground floor were the kitchen and Dorothy's bedroom ; on the floor above, a little drawing-room over the living-room, and Wordsworth's bedroom over his sister's. The drawing-room was also Wordsworth's library. "The two or three hundred volumes," writes De Quincey, "occupied a little, homely, painted bookcase, fixed into one of two shallow recesses, formed on each side of the fireplace by the projection of the chimney. . . . They were ill-bound, or not bound at all—in boards, sometimes in tatters ; many were imperfect as to the number of volumes, mutilated as to the number of pages ; sometimes, where it seemed worth while, the defects being supplied by manuscript ; sometimes not." It is evident, De Quincey continues, that the owner of these books must have had "independent sources of enjoyment

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to fill up the major part of his time." He was not indeed a bookman at all, in the sense in which his friend Southey, for example, was a bookman; "Books," he once said of Southey, "were in fact his *passion*; and *wandering*, I can with truth affirm, was mine." "Ninety-ninths of my verses," he declared towards the end of his life, "have been murmured out in the open air. One day a stranger, having walked round the garden and grounds of Rydal Mount, asked one of the female servants, who happened to be at the door, permission to see her master's study. 'This,' said she, leading him forward, 'is my master's library, where he keeps his books, but his study is out of doors.' After a long absence from home it has more than once happened that some one of my cottage neighbours . . . has said, 'Well, there he is! we are glad to hear him *booing* about again.'"¹

A few months after the settlement at Dove Cottage, Wordsworth was busy with a second edition of "Lyrical Ballads," in two volumes, with the famous polemical preface already referred to. This, though always spoken of as the edition of 1800, was actually published in January 1801, and was followed by a third edition in 1802 and a fourth in 1805. Perhaps the most important new poem in the enlarged collection is the one entitled "Michael," on the whole the finest example of Wordsworth's narrative poetry of humble life. He called it

¹ Cp. "and heard the poet mutter his prelusive songs" in the passage just quoted from "The Recluse."

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a "pastoral poem," thus challenging comparison with the conventional pastoralism, or hopelessly unreal treatment of shepherds and the country, which had long been a pernicious tradition in literature. The story itself, he explains, was the first of those "domestic tales" of his native region which had interested him even as a boy. "Homely and rude" he admits it to be; yet he proposes to tell it "for the delight of a few natural hearts," and in the firm conviction that the emotions may be stirred without that "outrageous stimulation" by sensational incident against which it was in part the object of his preface to protest. "I have attempted," he wrote to his friend Thomas Poole, "to give a picture of a man of strong mind and lively sensibility, agitated by two of the most powerful affections of the human heart—the parental affection and the love of property, *landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, home, and personal and family independence." Michael himself, as he told Charles James Fox, is in fact a kind of type of those "statesmen," or "independent proprietors of land," who "are now almost confined to the north of England" and "whose little tract of land serves as a kind of rallying point for their domestic feelings, as a tablet upon which they are written, which makes them objects of memory in a thousand instances, when they would otherwise be forgotten." This local feature in the poem must not be forgotten in the reading of it.

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MICHAEL

If from the public way you turn your steps
Up the tumultuous brook of Greenhead Ghyll,
You will suppose that with an upright path
Your feet must struggle ; in such bold ascent
The pastoral mountains front you, face to face.
But, courage ! for around that boisterous brook
The mountains have all opened out themselves,
And made a hidden valley of their own.
No habitation can be seen ; but they
Who journey thither find themselves alone
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites
That overhead are sailing in the sky.
It is in truth an utter solitude ;
Nor should I have made mention of this Dell
But for one object which you might pass by,
Might see and notice not. Beside the brook
Appears a straggling heap of unhewn stones !
And to that simple object appertains
A story—unenriched with strange events,
Yet not unfit, I deem, for the fireside,
Or for the summer shade. It was the first
Of those domestic tales that spake to me
Of shepherds, dwellers in the valleys, men
Whom I already loved ; not verily
For their own sakes, but for the fields and hills
Where was their occupation and abode.
And hence this Tale, while I was yet a Boy
Careless of books, yet having felt the power
Of Nature, by the gentle agency
Of natural objects, led me on to feel
For passions that were not my own, and think
(At random and imperfectly indeed)
On man, the heart of man, and human life.

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Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts ;
And, with yet fonder feeling, for the sake
Of youthful Poets, who among these hills
Will be my second self when I am gone.

Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
There dwelt a Shepherd, Michael was his name ;
An old man, stout of heart, and strong of limb.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength : his mind was keen,
Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,
And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone ; and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the South
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.
The Shepherd, at such warning, of his flock
Bethought him, and he to himself would say,
“ The winds are now devising work for me ! ”
And, truly, at all times, the storm, that drives
The traveller to a shelter, summoned him
Up to the mountains : he had been alone
Amid the heart of many thousand mists,
That came to him, and left him, on the heights.
So lived he till his eightieth year was past.
And grossly that man errs, who should suppose
That the green valleys, and the streams and rocks,
Were things indifferent to the Shepherd's thoughts.
Fields, where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
The common air ; hills, which with vigorous step
He had so often climbed ; which had impressed
So many incidents upon his mind

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Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear ;
Which, like a book, preserved the memory
Of the dumb animals, whom he had saved,
Had fed or sheltered, linking to such acts
The certainty of honourable gain ;
Those fields, those hills—what could they less ? had
laid

Strong hold on his affections, were to him
A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
The pleasure which there is in life itself.

His days had not been passed in singleness.
His Helpmate was a comely matron, old—
Though younger than himself full twenty years.
She was a woman of a stirring life,
Whose heart was in her house : two wheels she
had

Of antique form ; this large, for spinning wool ;
That small, for flax ; and if one wheel had rest
It was because the other was at work.
The Pair had but one inmate in their house,
An only Child, who had been born to them
When Michael, telling o'er his years, began
To deem that he was old,—in shepherd's phrase,
With one foot in the grave. This only Son,
With two brave sheep-dogs tried in many a storm,
The one of an inestimable worth,
Made all their household. I may truly say,
That they were as a proverb in the vale
For endless industry. When day was gone,
And from their occupations out of doors
The Son and Father were come home, even then,
Their labour did not cease ; unless when all
Turned to the cleanly supper-board, and there,
Each with a mess of pottage and skimmed milk,
Sat round the basket piled with oaten cakes,

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And their plain home-made cheese. Yet when the meal

Was ended, Luke (for so the Son was named)
And his old Father both betook themselves
To such convenient work as might employ
Their hands by the fireside ; perhaps to card
Wool for the Housewife's spindle, or repair
Some injury done to sickle, flail, or scythe,
Or other implement of house or field.

Down from the ceiling, by the chimney's edge,
That in our ancient uncouth country style
With huge and black projection overbrowed
Large space beneath, as duly as the light
Of day grew dim the Housewife hung a lamp ;
An aged utensil, which had performed
Service beyond all others of its kind.
Early at evening did it burn—and late,
Surviving comrade of uncounted hours,
Which, going by from year to year, had found,
And left, the couple neither gay perhaps
Nor cheerful, yet with objects and with hopes,
Living a life of eager industry.

And now, when Luke had reached his eighteenth year,
There by the light of this old lamp they sate,
Father and Son, while far into the night
The Housewife plied her own peculiar work,
Making the cottage through the silent hours
Murmur as with the sound of summer flies.
This light was famous in its neighbourhood,
And was a public symbol of the life
That thrifty Pair had lived. For, as it chanced,
Their cottage on a plot of rising ground
Stood single, with large prospect, north and south,
High into Easedale, up to Dunmail-Raise,
And westward to the village near the lake ;

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And from this constant light, so regular
And so far seen, the House itself, by all
Who dwelt within the limits of the vale,
Both old and young, was named *The Evening Star*.

Thus living on through such a length of years,
The Shepherd, if he loved himself, must needs
Have loved his Helpmate ; but to Michael's heart
This son of his old age was yet more dear—
Less from instinctive tenderness, the same
Fond spirit that blindly works in the blood of all—
Than that a child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts,
And stirrings of inquietude, when they
By tendency of nature needs must fail.
Exceeding was the love he bare to him,
His heart and his heart's joy ! For oftentimes
Old Michael, while he was a babe in arms,
Had done him female service, not alone
For pastime and delight, as is the use
Of fathers, but with patient mind enforced
To acts of tenderness ; and he had rocked
His cradle, as with a woman's gentle hand.

And, in a later time, ere yet the Boy
Had put on boy's attire, did Michael love,
Albeit of a stern unbending mind,
To have the Young-one in his sight, when he
Wrought in the field, or on his shepherd's stool
Sate with a fettered sheep before him stretched
Under the large old oak, that near his door
Stood single, and, from matchless depth of shade,
Chosen for the Shearer's covert from the sun,
Thence in our rustic dialect was called
The *Clipping Tree*, a name which yet it bears.
There, while they two were sitting in the shade,

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With others round them, earnest all and blithe,
Would Michael exercise his heart with looks
Of fond correction and reproof bestowed
Upon the Child, if he disturbed the sheep
By catching at their legs, or with his shouts
Scared them, while they lay still beneath the shears.

And when by Heaven's good grace the boy grew up
A healthy Lad, and carried in his cheek
Two steady roses that were five years old ;
Then Michael from a winter coppice cut
With his own hand a sapling, which he hooped
With iron, making it throughout in all
Due requisites a perfect shepherd's staff,
And gave it to the Boy ; wherewith equipt
He as a watchman oftentimes was placed
At gate or gap, to stem or turn the flock ;
And, to his office prematurely called,
There stood the urchin, as you will divine,
Something between a hindrance and a help ;
And for this cause not always, I believe,
Receiving from his Father hire of praise ;
Though nought was left undone which staff, or voice,
Or looks, or threatening gestures, could perform.

But soon as Luke, full ten years old, could stand
Against the mountain blasts ; and to the heights,
Not fearing toil, nor length of weary ways,
He with his Father daily went, and they
Were as companions, why should I relate
That objects which the Shepherd loved before
Were dearer now ? that from the Boy there came
Feelings and emanations—things which were
Light to the sun and music to the wind ;
And that the old Man's heart seemed born again ?

Thus in his Father's sight the Boy grew up :
And now, when he had reached his eighteenth year,

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He was his comfort and his daily hope.

While in this sort the simple household lived
From day to day, to Michael's ear there came
Distressful tidings. Long before the time
Of which I speak, the Shepherd had been bound
In surety for his brother's son, a man
Of an industrious life, and ample means ;
But unforeseen misfortunes suddenly
Had prest upon him ; and old Michael now
Was summoned to discharge the forfeiture,
A grievous penalty, but little less
Than half his substance. This unlooked-for claim,
At the first hearing, for a moment took
More hope out of his life than he supposed
That any old man ever could have lost.
As soon as he had armed himself with strength
To look his trouble in the face, it seemed
The Shepherd's sole resource to sell at once
A portion of his patrimonial fields.
Such was his first resolve ; he thought again,
And his heart failed him. " Isabel," said he,
Two evenings after he had heard the news,
" I have been toiling more than seventy years,
And in the open sunshine of God's love
Have we all lived ; yet if these fields of ours
Should pass into a stranger's hand, I think
That I could not lie quiet in my grave.
Our lot is a hard lot ; the sun himself
Has scarcely been more diligent than I ;
And I have lived to be a fool at last
To my own family. An evil man
That was, and made an evil choice, if he
Were false to us ; and if he were not false,
There are ten thousand to whom loss like this
Had been no sorrow. I forgive him ;—but

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'Twere better to be dumb than to talk thus.

When I began, my purpose was to speak
Of remedies and of a cheerful hope.
Our Luke shall leave us, Isabel ; the land
Shall not go from us, and it shall be free ;
He shall possess it, free as is the wind
That passes over it. We have, thou know'st,
Another kinsman—he will be our friend
In this distress. He is a prosperous man,
Thriving in trade—and Luke to him shall go,
And with his kinsman's help and his own thrift
He quickly will repair this loss, and then
He may return to us. If here he stay,
What can be done ? Where every one is poor,
What can be gained ? ”

At this the old Man paused,
And Isabel sat silent, for her mind
Was busy, looking back into past times.
There's Richard Bateman, thought she to herself,
He was a parish-boy—at the church-door
They made a gathering for him, shillings, pence
And halfpennies, wherewith the neighbours bought
A basket, which they filled with pedlar's wares ;
And, with this basket on his arm, the lad
Went up to London, found a master there,
Who, out of many, chose the trusty boy
To go and overlook his merchandise
Beyond the seas ; where he grew wondrous rich,
And left estates and monies to the poor.
And, at his birth-place, built a chapel, floored
With marble which he sent from foreign lands.
These thoughts, and many others of like sort,
Passed quickly through the mind of Isabel,
And her face brightened. The old Man was glad,
And thus resumed :—“ Well, Isabel ! this scheme

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

These two days, has been meat and drink to me.
Far more than we have lost is left us yet.

—We have enough—I wish indeed that I
Were younger ;—but this hope is a good hope.
—Make ready Luke's best garments, of the best
Buy for him more, and let us send him forth
To-morrow, or the next day, or to-night :
—If he *could* go, the Boy should go to-night."

Here Michael ceased, and to the fields went forth
With a light heart. The Housewife for five days
Was restless morn and night, and all day long
Wrought on with her best fingers to prepare
Things needful for the journey of her son.
But Isabel was glad when Sunday came
To stop her in her work : for, when she lay
By Michael's side, she through the last two nights
Heard him, how he was troubled in his sleep :
And when they rose at morning she could see
That all his hopes were gone. That day at noon
She said to Luke, while they two by themselves
Were sitting at the door, " Thou must not go :
We have no other Child but thee to lose,
None to remember—do not go away,
For if thou leave thy Father he will die."
The Youth made answer with a jocund voice ;
And Isabel, when she had told her fears,
Recovered heart. That evening her best fare
Did she bring forth, and all together sat
Like happy people round a Christmas fire.

With daylight Isabel resumed her work ;
And all the ensuing week the house appeared
As cheerful as a grove in Spring : at length
The expected letter from their kinsman came,
With kind assurances that he would do
His utmost for the welfare of the Boy ;

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

To which, requests were added, that forthwith
He might be sent to him. Ten times or more
The letter was read over ; Isabel
Went forth to show it to the neighbours round ;
Nor was there at that time on English land
A prouder heart than Luke's. When Isabel
Had to her house returned, the old Man said,
“ He shall depart to-morrow.” To this word
The Housewife answered, talking much of things
Which, if at such short notice he should go,
Would surely be forgotten. But at length
She gave consent, and Michael was at ease.

Near the tumultuous brook of Greenhead Ghyll,
In that deep valley, Michael had designed
To build a Sheepfold ; and, before he heard
The tidings of his melancholy loss,
For this same purpose he had gathered up
A heap of stones, which by the streamlet's edge
Lay thrown together, ready for the work.
With Luke that evening thitherward he walked :
And soon as they had reached the place he stopped,
And thus the old Man spake to him :—“ My Son,
To-morrow thou wilt leave me : with full heart
I look upon thee, for thou art the same
That wert a promise to me ere thy birth,
And all thy life hast been my daily joy.
I will relate to thee some little part
Of our two histories ; 'twill do thee good
When thou art from me, even if I should touch
On things thou canst not know of.—After thou
First cam'st into the world—as oft befalls
To new-born infants—thou didst sleep away
Two days, and blessings from thy Father's tongue
Then fell upon thee. Day by day passed on,
And still I loved thee with increasing love.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

Never to living ear came sweeter sounds
Than when I heard thee by our own fireside
First uttering, without words, a natural tune ;
While thou, a feeding babe, didst in thy joy
Sing at thy Mother's breast. Month followed month,
And in the open fields my life was passed
And on the mountains ; else I think that thou
Hadst been brought up upon thy Father's knees.
But we were playmates, Luke : among these hills,
As well thou knowest, in us the old and young
Have played together, nor with me didst thou
Lack any pleasure which a boy can know."
Luke had a manly heart ; but at these words
He sobbed aloud. The old Man grasped his hand,
And said, " Nay, do not take it so—I see
That these are things of which I need not speak.
—Even to the utmost I have been to thee
A kind and a good Father : and herein
I but repay a gift which I myself
Received at others' hands ; for, though now old
Beyond the common life of man, I still
Remember them who loved me in my youth.
Both of them sleep together : here they lived,
As all their Forefathers had done ; and when
At length their time was come, they were not loth
To give their bodies to the family mould.
I wished that thou should'st live the life they lived :
But, 'tis a long time to look back, my Son,
And see so little gain from threescore years.
These fields were burthened when they came to
me ;
Till I was forty years of age, not more
Than half of my inheritance was mine.
I toiled and toiled ; God blessed me in my work,
And till these three weeks past the land was free.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

—It looks as if it never could endure
Another Master. Heaven forgive me, Luke,
If I judge ill for thee, but it seems good
That thou should'st go."

At this the old Man paused ;
Then, pointing to the stones near which they stood,
Thus, after a short silence, he resumed :
" This was a work for us ; and now, my Son,
It is a work for me. But, lay one stone—
Here, lay it for me, Luke, with thine own hands.
Nay, Boy, be of good hope ;—we both may live
To see a better day. At eighty-four
I still am strong and hale ;—do thou thy part ;
I will do mine.—I will begin again
With many tasks that were resigned to thee :
Up to the heights, and in among the storms,
Will I without thee go again, and do
All works which I was wont to do alone,
Before I knew thy face.—Heaven bless thee, Boy !
Thy heart these two weeks has been beating fast
With many hopes ; it should be so—yes—yes—
I knew that thou could'st never have a wish
To leave me, Luke : thou hast been bound to me
Only by links of love : when thou art gone,
What will be left to us !—But, I forget
My purposes. Lay now the corner-stone,
As I requested ; and hereafter, Luke,
When thou art gone away, should evil men
Be thy companions, think of me, my Son,
And of this moment ; hither turn thy thoughts,
And God will strengthen thee : amid all fear
And all temptation, Luke, I pray that thou
May'st bear in mind the life thy Fathers lived,
Who, being innocent, did for that cause
Bestir them in good deeds. Now, fare thee well—

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

When thou return'st, thou in this place wilt see
A work which is not here : a covenant
'Twill be between us ; but, whatever fate
Befall thee, I shall love thee to the last,
And bear thy memory with me to the grave."

The Shepherd ended here ; and Luke stooped down,
And, as his Father had requested, laid
The first stone of the Sheepfold. At the sight
The old Man's grief broke from him ; to his heart
He pressed his Son, he kissèd him and wept ;
And to the house together they returned.]

—Hushed was that House in peace, or seeming peace,
Ere the night fell :—with morrow's dawn the Boy
Began his journey, and when he had reached
The public way, he put on a bold face ;
And all the neighbours, as he passed their doors,
Came forth with wishes and with farewell prayers,
That followed him till he was out of sight.

A good report did from their Kinsman come,
Of Luke and his well-doing : and the Boy
Wrote loving letters, full of wondrous news,
Which, as the Housewife phrased it, were throughout
" The prettiest letters that were ever seen."
Both parents read them with rejoicing hearts.
So, many months passed on : and once again
The Shepherd went about his daily work
With confident and cheerful thoughts ; and now
Sometimes when he could find a leisure hour
He to that valley took his way, and there
Wrought at the Sheepfold. Meantime Luke began
To slacken in his duty ; and, at length,
He in the dissolute city gave himself
To evil courses : ignominy and shame
Fell on him, so that he was driven at last
To seek a hiding-place beyond the seas.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

There is a comfort in the strength of love ;
'Twill make a thing endurable, which else
Would overset the brain, or break the heart :
I have conversed with more than one who well
Remember the old Man, and what he was
Years after he had heard this heavy news.
His bodily frame had been from youth to age
Of an unusual strength. Among the rocks
He went, and still looked up to sun and cloud,
And listened to the wind ; and, as before,
Performed all kinds of labour for his sheep,
And for the land, his small inheritance.
And to that hollow dell from time to time
Did he repair, to build the Fold of which
His flock had need. 'Tis not forgotten yet
The pity which was then in every heart
For the old Man—and 'tis believed by all
That many and many a day he thither went,
And never lifted up a single stone.

There, by the Sheepfold, sometimes was he seen
Sitting alone, or with his faithful Dog,
Then old, beside him, lying at his feet.
The length of full seven years, from time to time,
He at the building of this Sheepfold wrought,
And left the work unfinished when he died.
Three years, or little more, did Isabel
Survive her Husband : at her death the estate
Was sold, and went into a stranger's hand.
The Cottage which was named the *Evening Star*
Is gone—the ploughshare has been through the ground
On which it stood ; great changes have been wrought
In all the neighbourhood :—yet the oak is left
That grew beside their door ; and the remains
Of the unfinished Sheepfold may be seen
Beside the boisterous brook of Greenhead Ghyll.

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With this poem it is natural to associate one written some two years later, in which the same deep sympathy is shown with the lives and sufferings of the poor. In "Resolution and Independence," however, the central interest lies, not in the narrative itself, but in the moral deduced, and that moral is distinctively Wordsworthian. That through faith and fortitude a man may lift himself above the influence of external circumstance was one of his cardinal thoughts, and it is very characteristic of him that this inspiring lesson should here be linked with a figure so obscure as that of the old leech-gatherer. His own account of the poem, contained in a letter to some friends, will be read with interest.

I will explain to you in prose my feelings in writing *that* poem. . . . I describe myself as having been exalted to the highest pitch of delight by the joyousness and beauty of nature ; and then as depressed, even in the midst of those beautiful objects, to the lowest dejection and despair. A young poet in the midst of the happiness of nature is described as overwhelmed by the thoughts of the miserable reverses which have befallen the happiest of men, *viz.* poets. I think of this till I am so deeply impressed with it that I consider the manner in which I was rescued from my dejection and despair almost as an interposition of Providence. A person reading the poem with feelings like mine will have been awed and controlled, expecting something spiritual or supernatural. What is brought forward ? A lonely place, "a pond by which an old man *was*, far from all house or

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home” ;¹ not *stood*, nor *sat*, but *was*,—the figure presented in the most naked simplicity possible. The feeling of spirituality or supernaturalness is again referred to as being strong in my mind in this passage. “How came he here ? ” thought I, “or what can he be doing ? ” I then described him, whether ill or well is not for me to judge with perfect confidence ; but this I *can* affirm, that though I believe God has given me a strong imagination, I cannot conceive a figure more impressive than that of an old man like this, the survivor of a wife and ten children, travelling alone among the mountains and all lonely places, carrying with him his own fortitude and the necessities which an unjust state of society has laid upon him.

RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE

There was a roaring in the wind all night ;
The rain came heavily and fell in floods ;
But now the sun is rising calm and bright ;
The birds are singing in the distant woods ;
Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods ;
The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters ;
And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.

All things that love the sun are out of doors ;
The sky rejoices in the morning's birth ;
The grass is bright with rain-drops ;—on the moors
The hare is running races in her mirth ;
And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist, that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

¹ The text was subsequently altered at this point, as will be seen.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

I was a Traveller then upon the moor,
I saw the hare that raced about with joy ;
I heard the woods and distant waters roar ;
Or heard them not, as happy as a boy :
The pleasant season did my heart employ :
My old remembrances went from me wholly ;
And all the ways of men, so vain and melancholy.

But, as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
Of joy in minds that can no further go,
As high as we have mounted in delight
In our dejection do we sink as low ;
To me that morning did it happen so ;
And fears and fancies thick upon me came ;
Dim sadness—and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor
could name.

I heard the sky-lark warbling in the sky ;
And I bethought me of the playful hare :
Even such a happy Child of earth am I ;
Even as these blissful creatures do I fare ;
Far from the world I walk, and from all care ;
But there may come another day to me—
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life's business were a summer mood ;
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good ;
But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all ?

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous Boy,
The sleepless Soul that perished in his pride ;
Of Him who walked in glory and in joy

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

Following his plough, along the mountain-side :
By our own spirits are we deified :
We Poets in our youth begin in gladness ;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Now, whether it were by peculiar grace,
A leading from above, a something given,
Yet it befell, that, in this lonely place,
When I with these untoward thoughts had striven,
Beside a pool bare to the eye of heaven
I saw a Man before me unawares :
The oldest man he seemed that ever wore grey hairs.

As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couched on the bald top of an eminence ;
Wonder to all who do the same espy,
By what means it could thither come, and whence ;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense :
Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
Of rock or sand repositeth, there to sun itself ;

Such seemed this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep—in his extreme old age :
His body was bent double, feet and head
Coming together in life's pilgrimage ;
As if some dire constraint of pain, or rage
Of sickness felt by him in times long past,
A more than human weight upon his frame had cast.

Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood :
And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
Upon the margin of that moorish flood
Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
That heareth not the loud winds when they call
And moveth all together, if it move at all.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

At length, himself unsettling, he the pond
Stirred with his staff, and fixedly did look
Upon the muddy water, which he conned,
As if he had been reading in a book :
And now a stranger's privilege I took ;
And, drawing to his side, to him did say,
“ This morning gives us promise of a glorious day.”

A gentle answer did the old Man make,
In courteous speech which forth he slowly drew :
And him with further words I thus bespake,
“ What occupation do you there pursue ?
This is a lonesome place for one like you.”
Ere he replied, a flash of mild surprise
Broke from the sable orbs of his yet-vivid eyes,

His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
But each in solemn order followed each,
With something of a lofty utterance drest—
Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
Of ordinary men ; a stately speech ;
Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

He told, that to these waters he had come
To gather leeches, being old and poor :
Employment hazardous and wearisome !
And he had many hardships to endure :
From pond to pond he roamed, from moor to moor ;
Housing, with God's good help, by choice or chance,
And in this way he gained an honest maintenance.

The old Man still stood talking by my side ;
But now his voice to me was like a stream
Scarce heard ; nor word from word could I divide ;

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

And the whole body of the Man did seem
Like one whom I had met with in a dream ;
Or like a man from some far region sent,
To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

My former thoughts returned : the fear that kills ;
And hope that is unwilling to be fed ;
Cold, pain, and labour, and all fleshly ills ;
And mighty Poets in their misery dead.
—Perplexed, and longing to be comforted,
My question eagerly did I renew,
“ How is it that you live, and what is it you do ? ”

He with a smile did then his words repeat ;
And said, that, gathering leeches, far and wide
He travelled ; stirring thus about his feet
The waters of the pools where they abide.
“ Once I could meet with them on every side ;
But they have dwindled long by slow decay ;
Yet still I persevere, and find them where I may.”

While he was talking thus, the lonely place,
The old Man's shape, and speech—all troubled me :
In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently.
While I these thoughts within myself pursued,
He, having made a pause, the same discourse renewed.

And soon with this he other matter blended,
Cheerfully uttered, with demeanour kind,
But stately in the main ; and when he ended,
I could have laughed myself to scorn to find
In that decrepit Man so firm a mind.
“ God,” said I, “ be my help and stay secure ;
I'll think of the Leech-gatherer on the lonely moor ! ”

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

In 1801 Wordsworth began to use the sonnet. One afternoon his sister read to him some sonnets of Milton. Already acquainted with them as he was, he was then particularly struck by their "dignity, simplicity, and majestic harmony." He at once "took fire," and that same afternoon produced three sonnets—"the first I ever wrote except an irregular one at school."

The next year he and Dorothy spent a month's holiday in Calais. On July 31 they left London for Dover, and at a very early hour crossed Westminster Bridge. Here is an extract from Dorothy's "Journal" :—

Left London between five and six o'clock of the morning outside the Dover coach. A beautiful morning. The city, St. Paul's, with the river—a multitude of little boats, made a beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge ; the houses not overhung by their clouds of smoke, and were hung out endlessly ; yet the sun shone so brightly, with such a pure light, that there was something like the purity of one of Nature's own grand spectacles.

Such was the impression which that early morning ride made upon one of the two travellers. The impression which it made upon the other is to be found in the magnificent sonnet—one of Wordsworth's most perfect things—which was actually written on the roof of the coach, and afterwards underwent no verbal change.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

COMPOSED UPON WESTMINSTER BRIDGE

SEPTEMBER 3, 1802.¹

Earth has not anything to show more fair :
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty :
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky ;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill ;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
The river glideth at his own sweet will :
Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;
And all that mighty heart is lying still !

Several sonnets were written during the stay at Calais, among them one almost as fine as the foregoing.

It is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is quiet as a Nun
Breathless with adoration ; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity ;
The gentleness of heaven broods o'er the Sea :
Listen ! the mighty Being is awake,
And doth with his eternal motion make
A sound like thunder—everlastingly.

¹ Wordsworth's date is now known to be incorrect. As Prof. Knight says, Wordsworth's memory was not always to be trusted in regard to dates.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

Dear Child ! dear Girl ! that walkest with me here,¹
If thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine :
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year ;
And worship'st at the Temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when we know it not.

Wordsworth was the most prolific, and on the whole perhaps the greatest, of English sonnet-writers ; he produced upwards of 400 poems in this form ; and while many of these (including the 132 of the Ecclesiastical series and the 14 on the Punishment of Death) belong to the least inspired part of his output, his best work in this difficult field by reason of its volume no less than of its excellence entitles him to a position of pre-eminence. Undoubtedly the severe limitations of the form itself exercised a beneficial influence on his style. "In his larger poems his language is sometimes slovenly, and occasionally, as Sir Walter Scott said, he chooses to crawl on all-fours ; but this is rarely the case in the Sonnets . . . the language, like the thought, is that of a great master."² Two of his sonnets are sonnets on the sonnet, and these, though of later composition, may fittingly be given here.

Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room ;
And hermits are contented with their cells ;
And students with their pensive citadels ;

¹ It is a question whether this refers to Dorothy, or, as seems more probable, to one of two companions of the Wordsworths, Annette and Caroline, who are mentioned in Dorothy's "Journal," but of whom nothing seems to be known.

² J. Dennis, "English Sonnets," pp. 220, 221.

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Maids at the wheel, the weaver at his loom,
Sit blithe and happy ; bees that soar for bloom,
High as the highest Peak of Furness-fells,
Will murmur by the hour in foxglove bells :
In truth the prison, unto which we doom
Ourselves, no prison is : and hence for me,
In sundry moods, 'twas pastime to be bound
Within the Sonnet's scanty plot of ground ;
Pleased if some Souls (for such there needs must be)
Who have felt the weight of too much liberty,
Should find brief solace there, as I have found.

Scorn not the Sonnet ; Critic, you have frowned,
Mindless of its just honours ; with this key
Shakspeare unlocked his heart ; the melody
Of this small lute gave ease to Petrarch's wound ;
A thousand times this pipe did Tasso sound ;
With it Camöens soothed an exile's grief ;
The Sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow : a glow-worm lamp,
It cheered mild Spenser, called from Faeryland
To struggle through dark ways ; and, when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet ; whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few !

Soon after the settlement at Dove Cottage Wordsworth's financial position was much improved by the repayment by the second Lord Lonsdale of the sum long owing by his father to the Wordsworth family, together with all interest accruing in the meantime. This may perhaps have had something to do with an

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important step now taken by the poet. On their return from Calais he and Dorothy stayed for a month in London, and there, on October 4, he was quietly married in Brompton Church to Mary Hutchinson. He took her back to Dove Cottage, where her coming made little outward difference in the arrangements of the household, and did not in the least disturb the relations of brother and sister. Once more it was a case of three people with one soul. One poem belonging to the early years of his married life has already been quoted. To this I will now add two sonnets of many years later—1841—which are eloquent of the deep and quiet love which remained unchanged by lapse of time. The occasion was the painting of a portrait of Mrs. Wordsworth by Miss Margaret Gillies, and Wordsworth told his daughter that he “never poured out anything more truly from the heart.” This we can well believe. The touching tenderness of the second sonnet must always give it a high place in that rarer kind of love poetry which deals, not with love’s spring-tide of youthful passion, but with its calm autumnal beauty.

TO A PAINTER

All praise the Likeness by thy skill portrayed ;
But 'tis a fruitless task to paint for me,
Who, yielding not to changes Time has made,
By the habitual light of memory see
Eyes unbedimmed, see bloom that cannot fade,

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

And smiles that from their birth-place ne'er shall
flee

Into the land where ghosts and phantoms be ;
And, seeing this, own nothing in its stead.
Couldst thou go back into far-distant years,
Or share with me, fond thought ! that inward eye,
Then, and then only, Painter ! could thy Art
The visual powers of Nature satisfy,
Which hold, whate'er to common sight appears,
Their sovereign empire in a faithful heart.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT

Though I beheld at first with blank surprise
This Work, I now have gazed on it so long
I see its truth with unreluctant eyes ;
O, my Belovèd ! I have done thee wrong,
Conscious of blessedness, but, whence it sprung,
Ever too heedless, as I now perceive :
Morn into noon did pass, noon into eve,
And the old day was welcome as the young,
As welcome, and as beautiful—in sooth
More beautiful, as being a thing more holy :
Thanks to thy virtues, to the eternal youth
Of all thy goodness, never melancholy ;
To thy large heart and humble mind, that cast
Into one vision, future, present, past.

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X

IN June 1803 Wordsworth's first child, a son, was born, and on August 16 he set out for a tour in Scotland with Dorothy and Coleridge as his companions. Coleridge was, however, as Wordsworth said, "in bad spirits, and somewhat too much in love with his own dejection" ; he soon tired of the incessant rains, and at Loch Lomond gave up the expedition and started for Edinburgh, leaving brother and sister to go on together.

On the day of his departure, which was Sunday, August 28, as the friends were descending a hill towards the loch, they overtook two grey-plaided girls. "They answered us," writes Dorothy in her "Journal," "so sweetly that we were quite delighted, at the same time that they stared at us with an innocent look of wonder. I think I never heard the English language sound more sweetly than from the mouth of the elder of these girls, while she stood at the gate answering our inquiries, her face flushed with the rain ; her pronunciation was clear and distinct ; without difficulty ; yet slow, like that of a foreign speech." This elder girl, who was "exceedingly beautiful," made as strong an impression upon the two men of the party as upon Dorothy. Coleridge called her "a divine creature," and the memory of the meeting inspired Wordsworth, on his return home, to write the following poem.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

TO A HIGHLAND GIRL

Sweet Highland Girl, a very shower
Of beauty is thy earthly dower !
Twice seven consenting years have shed
Their utmost bounty on thy head :
And these grey rocks ; that household lawn ;
Those trees, a veil just half withdrawn ;
This fall of water that doth make
A murmur near the silent lake ;
This little bay ; a quiet road
That holds in shelter thy Abode—
In truth together do ye seem
Like something fashioned in a dream ;
Such Forms as from their covert peep
When earthly cares are laid asleep !
But, O fair Creature ! in the light
Of common day, so heavenly bright,
I bless Thee, Vision as thou art,
I bless thee with a human heart ;
God shield thee to thy latest years !
Thee, neither know I, nor thy peers ;
And yet my eyes are filled with tears.

With earnest feeling I shall pray
For thee when I am far away :
For never saw I mien, or face,
In which more plainly I could trace
Benignity and home-bred sense
Ripening in perfect innocence.
Here scattered, like a random seed,
Remote from men, Thou dost not need
The embarrassed look of shy distress,
And maidenly shamefacedness :
Thou wear'st upon thy forehead clear
The freedom of a Mountaineer :

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

A face with gladness overspread !
Soft smiles, by human kindness bred !
And seemliness complete, that sways
Thy courtesies, about thee plays ;
With no restraint, but such as springs
From quick and eager visitings
Of thoughts that lie beyond the reach
Of thy few words of English speech :
A bondage sweetly brooked, a strife
That gives thy gestures grace and life
So have I, not unmoved in mind,
Seen birds of tempest-loving kind—
Thus beating up against the wind.

What hand but would a garland cull
For thee who art so beautiful ?
O happy pleasure ! here to dwell
Beside thee in some heathy dell ;
Adopt your homely ways, and dress,
A Shepherd, thou a Shepherdess !
But I could frame a wish for thee
More like a grave reality :
Thou art to me but as a wave
Of the wild sea ; and I would have
Some claim upon thee, if I could,
Though but of common neighbourhood.
What joy to hear thee, and to see !
Thy elder Brother I would be,
Thy Father—anything to thee !
Now thanks to Heaven ! that of its grace
Hath led me to this lonely place.
Joy have I had ; and going hence
I bear away my recompence.
In spots like these it is we prize
Our Memory, feel that she hath eyes :
Then, why should I be loth to stir ?

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

I feel this place was made for her ;
To give new pleasure like the past,
Continued long as life shall last.
Nor am I loth, though pleased at heart,
Sweet Highland Girl ! from thee to part :
For I, methinks, till I grow old,
As fair before me shall behold,
As I do now, the cabin small,
The lake, the bay, the waterfall ;
And Thee, the Spirit of them all !

“The sort of prophecy with which the verses conclude,” Wordsworth told Miss Fenwick long afterwards, “has, through God’s goodness, been realized, and now, approaching the close of my seventy-third year, I have a most vivid remembrance of her and the beautiful objects with which she was surrounded.” She became for him indeed, it would seem, a kind of ideal type of womanly loveliness. He referred to her again in “The Three Cottage Girls” in his “Continental Memorials” seventeen years later ; and he even confessed—though such a confidence was perhaps scarcely judicious—that four lines (unidentified) originally composed as part of this Highland poem formed the germ of his verses to Mary Hutchinson, “She was a Phantom of Delight.”

At Dumfries a visit was paid to the grave of Burns, then unmarked by any stone, and to the cottage where the poet died. This visit was commemorated in three poems in Burns’s characteristic stanza-form, the first of which shall be here reproduced.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

AT THE GRAVE OF BURNS

I shiver, Spirit fierce and bold,
At thought of what I now behold :
As vapours breathed from dungeons cold,
 Strike pleasure dead,
So sadness comes from out the mould
 Where Burns is laid.

And have I then thy bones so near,
And thou forbidden to appear ?
As if it were thyself that's here
 I shrink with pain ;
And both my wishes and my fear
 Alike are vain.

Off weight—nor press on weight !—away
Dark thoughts !—they came, but not to stay ;
With chastened feelings would I pay
 The tribute due
To him, and aught that hides his clay
 From mortal view.

Fresh as the flower, whose modest worth
He sang, his genius “ glinted ” forth,
Rose like a star that touching earth,
 For so it seems,
Doth glorify its humble birth
 With matchless beams.

The piercing eye, the thoughtful brow,
The struggling heart, where be they now ?—
Full soon the Aspirant of the plough,
 The prompt, the brave,
Slept, with the obscurest, in the low
 And silent grave.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

I mourned with thousands, but as one
More deeply grieved, for He was gone
Whose light I hailed when first it shone,
 And showed my youth
How Verse may build a princely throne
 On humble truth.

Alas ! where'er the current tends,
Regret pursues and with it blends,—
Huge Criffel's hoary top ascends
 By Skiddaw seen,—
Neighbours we were, and loving friends
 We might have been ;

True friends though diversely inclined ;
But heart with heart and mind with mind,
Where the main fibres are entwined,
 Through Nature's skill,
May even by contraries be joined
 More closely still.

The tear will start, and let it flow ;
Thou " poor Inhabitant below,"
At this dread moment—even so—
 Might we together
Have sate and talked where gowans blow,
 Or on wild heather.

What treasures would have then been placed
Within my reach ; of knowledge graced
By fancy what a rich repast !
 But why go on ?—
Oh ! spare to sweep, thou mournful blast,
 His grave grass-grown.

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

There, too, a Son, his joy and pride,
(Not three weeks past the Stripling died,)
Lies gathered to his Father's side,
 Soul-moving sight !
Yet one to which is not denied
 Some sad delight :

For *he* is safe, a quiet bed
Hath early found among the dead,
Harboured where none can be misled,
 Wronged, or distressed ;
And surely here it may be said
 That such are blest.

And oh for Thee, by pitying grace
Checked oft-times in a devious race,
May He who halloweth the place
 Where Man is laid
Receive thy Spirit in the embrace
 For which it prayed !

Sighing I turned away ; but ere
Night fell I heard, or seemed to hear,
Music that sorrow comes not near,
 A ritual hymn,
Chaunted in love that casts out fear
 By Seraphim.

Two other noteworthy poems are associated with this Scottish tour. The first of these, like the lines "To a Highland Girl," was the outcome of a chance meeting. One Sunday evening after sundown, brother and sister were walking along the shore of Lake Ketterine, when, as Dorothy records, they met "two

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neatly dressed women, without hats. . . . One of them said to us in a friendly soft tone of voice, 'What, are you stepping westward?' I cannot describe how affecting this simple expression was in that remote place, with the western sky in front, yet glowing with the departed sun. William wrote the following poem long after, in remembrance of his feelings and mine."

STEPPING WESTWARD

"*What, you are stepping westward?*"—"Yea."
—'Twould be a *wildish* destiny,
If we, who thus together roam
In a strange Land, and far from home,
Were in this place the guests of Chance :
Yet who would stop, or fear to advance,
Though home or shelter he had none,
With such a sky to lead him on ?

The dewy ground was dark and cold ;
Behind, all gloomy to behold ;
And stepping westward seemed to be
A kind of *heavenly* destiny :
I liked the greeting ; 'twas a sound
Of something without place or bound ;
And seemed to give me spiritual right
To travel through that region bright.

The voice was soft, and she who spake
Was walking by her native lake :
The salutation had to me
The very sound of courtesy :
Its power was felt ; and while my eye
Was fixed upon the glowing Sky,

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The echo of the voice enwrought
A human sweetness with the thought
Of travelling through the world that lay
Before me in my endless way.

The second of the two poems in question was inspired in part by his own experience, in part by that of another. The sight of the reapers in the harvest fields through which the tourists passed recalled to Wordsworth's mind "a beautiful sentence in a MS. 'Tour in Scotland' written by a friend, the last line being taken from it *verbatim*." The reference is to the following passage in Thomas Wilkinson's "Tours to the British Mountains" (published in 1824): "Passed a female who was reaping alone; she sang in Erse, as she bended over her sickle; the sweetest human voice I ever heard; her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious, long after they were heard no more." Such is the origin of "The Solitary Reaper," and there is perhaps no other poem of Wordsworth's which has so much verbal magic as this.

THE SOLITARY REAPER

Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here, or gently pass!
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,
And sings a melancholy strain;
O listen! for the Vale profound
Is overflowing with the sound.

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No Nightingale did ever chaunt
More welcome notes to weary bands
Of travellers in some shady haunt,
Among Arabian sands :
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Will no one tell me what she sings ?—
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago :
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day ?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again ?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending ;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending ;—
I listened, motionless and still ;
And, as I mounted up the hill
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

One great event which closed this Scottish tour was Wordsworth's first meeting with Scott, on whom he and his sister called at Laswade so early in the morning that the Border Minstrel was not yet out of bed. Scott entertained them with his characteristic cordiality, and as he was himself bound for the Jedburgh assizes, accompanied them south

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through a region the romantic associations of which he was of all men the most competent to interpret. "My sister and I often talk of the happy days we spent in your company," wrote Wordsworth afterwards. "Such things do not often occur in life." The two poets parted at Hawick, and a couple of days later the Wordsworths were once more at Dove Cottage. Dorothy's account of their return gives us so charming a glimpse of the little household that it must not be omitted: "Sunday, Sept. 25th, 1803. A beautiful autumnal day. Breakfasted at a public-house by the road-side; dined at Threlkeld; arrived at home between eight and nine o'clock, where we found Mary in perfect health, Joanna Hutchinson with her, and little John asleep in the clothes-basket by the fire."

XI

IN 1805 the shadow of a great sorrow fell suddenly across Wordsworth's placid life. His sailor-brother John, whom he loved with all the quiet intensity of his nature, was shipwrecked and drowned in the English Channel. "For myself," Wordsworth wrote in that hour of darkness, "I feel there is something cut out of my life which cannot be restored. . . . I never wrote a line without thought of giving him pleasure. . . . But let me stop. I will not be cast down; even if only for his sake I will not be dejected. I have much yet to do, and pray God to give me strength and

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power : his part of the agreement between us is brought to an end, mine remains ; and I hope when I shall be able to think of him with a calmer mind, that the remembrance of him dead will even animate me more than the joy which I had in him living." This is the " deep distress " which, he tells us, " humanised " his soul. He wrote some 'Elegiac Verses' in memory of his brother, but the note of sorrow is most finely struck, not in these, but rather in a poem belonging to the same period which ranks amongst the greatest of his productions, and which I here give in full. The Sir George Beaumont, to whom it introduces us, was a wealthy connoisseur whose friendship, as Mr. Myers has said, formed for many years the poet's " closest link with the world of culture and art." He was not a great painter ; but the genuine feeling for nature shown in his landscapes made a strong appeal to Wordsworth's sympathies.

ELEGIAC STANZAS

SUGGESTED BY A PICTURE OF PEELE CASTLE,¹ IN
A STORM, PAINTED BY SIR GEORGE BEAUMONT

I was thy neighbour once, thou rugged Pile !
Four summer weeks I dwelt in sight of thee :
I saw thee every day ; and all the while
Thy Form was sleeping on a glassy sea.

¹ Not apparently, as is commonly supposed, Peele Castle in the Isle of Man, but Piel Castle, near Barrow-in-Furness. See Prof. Knight's note in the Eversley edition of Wordsworth's " Poetical Works," iii. 56, 57.

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So pure the sky, so quiet was the air !
So like, so very like, was day to day !
Whene'er I looked, thy Image still was there ;
It trembled, but it never passed away.

How perfect was the calm ! it seemed no sleep ;
No mood, which season takes away, or brings :
I could have fancied that the mighty Deep
Was even the gentlest of all gentle Things.

Ah ! then, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
To express what then I saw ; and add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream ;

I would have planted thee, thou hoary Pile,
Amid a world how different from this !
Beside a sea that could not cease to smile ;
On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss.

Thou shouldst have seemed a treasure-house divine
Of peaceful years ; a chronicle of heaven ;—
Of all the sunbeams that did ever shine
The very sweetest had to thee been given.

A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
Elysian quiet, without toil or strife ;
No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,
Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.

Such, in the fond illusion of my heart,
Such Picture would I at that time have made :
And seen the soul of truth in every part,
A stedfast peace that might not be betrayed.

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So once it would have been,—'tis so no more ;
I have submitted to a new control :
A power is gone, which nothing can restore ;
A deep distress hath humanised my Soul.

Not for a moment could I now behold
A smiling sea, and be what I have been :
The feeling of my loss will ne'er be old ;
This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.

Then, Beaumont, Friend ! who would have been the
Friend,
If he had lived, of Him whom I deplore,
This work of thine I blame not, but commend ;
This sea in anger, and that dismal shore.

O 'tis a passionate Work !—yet wise and well,
Well chosen is the spirit that is here ;
That Hulk which labours in the deadly swell,
This rueful sky, this pageantry of fear !

And this huge Castle, standing here sublime,
I love to see the look with which it braves,
Cased in the unfeeling armour of old time,
The lightning, the fierce wind, and trampling waves.

Farewell, farewell the heart that lives alone,
Housed in a dream, at distance from the Kind !
Such happiness, wherever it be known,
Is to be pitied ; for 'tis surely blind.

But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne !
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.—
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

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Another noble poem is connected with John's memory—the "Character of a Happy Warrior." Some of the features of this ideal portrait were admittedly derived from Nelson ; but Nelson's relations with Lady Hamilton made it impossible for Wordsworth "to connect his name with the poem as I could wish, or even to think of him with satisfaction in reference to the idea of what a warrior ought to be." This he subsequently stated in a note in which he further declared that "many elements of the character here portrayed were found in my brother John." As a study of ideal manhood, in which strength and tenderness, courage and purity are combined, this short poem is a masterpiece ; and there is, as has been well said, "a Roman majesty in its simple and weighty speech."

CHARACTER OF THE HAPPY WARRIOR

Who is the happy Warrior ? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to be ?
—It is the generous Spirit, who, when brought
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought :
Whose high endeavours are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright :
Who, with a natural instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn ;
Abides by this resolve, and stops not there,
But makes his moral being his prime care ;
Who, doomed to go in company with Pain,
And Fear, and Bloodshed, miserable train !
Turns his necessity to glorious gain ;
In face of these doth exercise a power

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Which is our human nature's highest dower ;
Controls them and subdues, transmutes, bereaves
Of their bad influence, and their good receives :
By objects, which might force the soul to abate
Her feeling, rendered more compassionate ;
Is placable—because occasions rise
So often that demand such sacrifice ;
More skilful in self-knowledge, even more pure,
As tempted more ; more able to endure,
As more exposed to suffering and distress ;
Thence, also, more alive to tenderness.
—'Tis he whose law is reason ; who depends
Upon that law as on the best of friends ;
Whence, in a state where men are tempted still
To evil for a guard against worse ill,
And what in quality or act is best
Doth seldom on a right foundation rest,
He labours good on good to fix, and owes
To virtue every triumph that he knows :
—Who, if he rise to station of command,
Rises by open means ; and there will stand
On honourable terms, or else retire,
And in himself possess his own desire ;
Who comprehends his trust, and to the same
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim ;
And therefore does not stoop, nor lie in wait
For wealth, or honours, or for worldly state ;
Whom they must follow ; on whose head must fall,
Like showers of manna, if they come at all :
Whose powers shed round him in the common strife,
Or mild concerns of ordinary life,
A constant influence, a peculiar grace ;
But who, if he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which Heaven has joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,

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Is happy as a Lover ; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a Man inspired ;
And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw ;
Or if an unexpected call succeed,
Come when it will, is equal to the need :
—He who, though thus endued as with a sense
And faculty for storm and turbulence,
Is yet a Soul whose master-bias leans
To homefelt pleasures and to gentle scenes ;
Sweet images ! which, wheresoe'er he be,
Are at his heart ; and such fidelity
It is his darling passion to approve ;
More brave for this, that he hath much to love :—
'Tis, finally, the Man, who, lifted high,
Conspicuous object in a Nation's eye,
Or left unthought-of in obscurity,—
Who, with a toward or untoward lot,
Prosperous or adverse, to his wish or not—
Plays, in the many games of life, that one
Where what he most doth value must be won :
Whom neither shape of danger can dismay,
Nor thought of tender happiness betray ;
Who, not content that former worth stand fast,
Looks forward, persevering to the last,
From well to better, daily self-surpass :
Who, whether praise of him must walk the earth
For ever, and to noble deeds give birth,
Or he must fall, to sleep without his fame,
And leave a dead unprofitable name—
Finds comfort in himself and in his cause ;
And, while the mortal mist is gathering, draws
His breath in confidence of Heaven's applause :
This is the happy Warrior ; this is He
That every Man in arms should wish to be.

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Before we close our record of the Dove Cottage period we have still to deal with the famous Immortality Ode, written according to Wordsworth's statement between 1803 and 1806, with an interval of "two years at least" between "the four first stanzas and the remaining part." In that interval, it is not inopportune to recall, he had lost his brother, and the tempering influences of sorrow are undoubtedly to be felt in the deepened tone of the concluding passages. It must be frankly admitted that there is an initial flaw in this great ode; the Platonic idea from which it starts—that of the soul's pre-existence—has been justly censured as too fantastic to be made the basis of a philosophical poem; and though Wordsworth himself protested against the literal interpretation of so "shadowy a notion," even its use as a symbol to represent the nearness of the child to nature and God may still be objected to on the ground that such a view of childhood is in flat contradiction to the facts of common experience. Yet as Wordsworth gives us poetry and not mere philosophy, inability to accept his data need not prevent us from enjoying the magnificent edifice which he rears upon them. Briefly stated, his argument seems to be this. The soul of man is divine; it comes into this earthly life, not a blank (as Lockian empiricism had asserted), but bringing with it high spiritual instincts and powers. But the interests of the mundane and the temporal encroach upon it; and the divine instincts are stifled. We must

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strive, therefore, to keep these instincts alive ; to maintain the continuity of spiritual life ; to translate into the reasoned convictions of manhood the child's innate and spontaneous faith. To do this we must live as much as possible among the deeper things of our own natures and in intimate communion with the divine soul of the universe. Then we shall rejoice that reminiscences of the distant past, faint and shadowy though they be, do in fact bear witness to the soul's divine origin and heritage and to its kinship with the eternal order of things.

ODE

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
 To me did seem
 Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore ;—
 Turn wheresoe'er I may,
 By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

 The Rainbow comes and goes,
 And lovely is the Rose,
 The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
 Waters on a starry night
 Are beautiful and fair ;

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The sunshine is a glorious birth ;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief :
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong :
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep ;
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong ;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay ;
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday ;—
Thou Child of Joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy
Shepherd-boy !

Ye blessèd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make ; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee ;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
Oh evil day ! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers ; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm :—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear !
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone :
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat :
Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy ;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended ;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own ;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,

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And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,¹
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size !
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes !
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art ;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral ;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song :
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife ;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part ;
Filling from time to time his " humorous stage "
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage ;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity ;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep

¹ The reference is to Coleridge's little son, Hartley.

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Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—

Mighty Prophet ! Seer blest !

On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave ;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by ;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife ?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life !

O joy ! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive !

The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction : not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest—
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast :—

Not for these I raise

The song of thanks and praise ;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings ;
Blank misgivings of a Creature

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised :

But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections,

Which, be they what they may,

Are yet the fountain light of all our day,

Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make

Our noisy years seem moments in the being

Of the eternal Silence : truths that wake,

To perish never ;

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,

Nor Man nor Boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,

Can utterly abolish or destroy !

Hence in a season of calm weather

Though inland far we be,

Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea

Which brought us hither,

Can in a moment travel thither,

And see the Children sport upon the shore,

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song !

And let the young Lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound !

We in thought will join your throng,

Ye that pipe and ye that play,

Ye that through your hearts to-day

Feel the gladness of the May !

What though the radiance which was once so bright

Be now for ever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the hour

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower ;

WORDSWORTH & HIS POETRY

We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind ;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be ;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering ;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves !
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might ;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they ;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet ;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality ;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

XII

A SECOND child, a girl christened Dorothy, had been born in August 1804, and when in June 1805 a third child, Thomas, came, Dove Cottage was found to be too small for the fast increasing family. The Wordsworths were therefore compelled to leave

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it, and while seeking another home of their own to suit them, spent the winter of 1806--7 in a farmhouse at Coleorton, Leicestershire, lent to them by Sir George Beaumont. Here they were visited by Coleridge, on his return from Malta, to whom Wordsworth read the now finished "Prelude." Then in the following summer they took a newly built house, Allan Bank, on the height between Grasmere and Easedale. Here they had to encounter all the discomforts of damp cellars and smoky chimneys ; on one cold day, it is recorded, the whole family had to go to bed because not a fire in the house could be induced to burn. The worst of these defects were, however, remedied, and the Wordsworths remained at Allan Bank till the spring of 1811. There Coleridge, broken in health and in wretched spirits, was again their guest ; there they were also visited by De Quincey, who presently became the tenant of Dove Cottage ; and there two more children were born, Catherine in 1808 and William in 1810. Another migration was then made, this time to Grasmere Parsonage. But the death of two of the children, Catherine in her fourth year and Thomas in his seventh, made the house unbearable to the sorrowing father. "It stands close to the churchyard," he wrote to Lord Lonsdale, "and I have found it absolutely necessary that we should quit a place which, by recalling to our minds at every moment the losses we have sustained in the course of the last year, would grievously retard our progress

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towards that tranquillity which it is our duty to aim at." In the spring of 1813 Wordsworth accordingly left the parsonage and settled at Rydal Mount, which was to be his home for the rest of his life.

While at Coleorton he was busy chiefly with the preparation of the two volumes of his works which appeared in 1807. Among the new poems in these volumes was the "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle," which is specially remarkable for the closing stanzas describing "the good Lord Clifford." The second of these might fittingly be applied to the poet himself :

Alas ! the impassioned minstrel did not know
How, by Heaven's grace, this Clifford's heart was
framed,
How he, long forced in humble walks to go,
Was softened into feeling, soothed, and tamed.

Love had he found in huts where poor men lie ;
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

In him the savage virtue of the Race,
Revenge, and all ferocious thoughts were dead :
Nor did he change ; but kept in lofty place
The wisdom which adversity had bred.

Glad were the vales, and every cottage hearth ;
The Shepherd-lord was honoured more and more ;
And, ages after he was laid in earth,
"The good Lord Clifford" was the name he bore.

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These fine stanzas contain, in Dowden's phrase, the "peculiar virtue" of the poem. But as the same critic notes, its "feudal and chivalric spirit" is also very striking. That spirit reappears in "The White Doe of Rylstone," founded on a local tradition connected with the country round Bolton Priory, which Wordsworth visited in the summer of the same year. In that poem, as he himself perceived, he apparently challenged comparison with Scott. There is thus some interest in his own statement of the essential difference between his work on a feudal subject and that of his great contemporary. Scott, he pointed out, had concerned himself only with external incident. He on the other hand had been preoccupied with the underlying moral and spiritual meaning of his story.

During the interval between the vacating of Dove Cottage and the settlement at Rydal Mount, Wordsworth worked hard at "The Excursion," the greater part of which was written at this time. He also came forward as a politician and prose writer on current events. The most considerable result of his industry in this field was the pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra, which Canning thought the finest piece of political eloquence which had appeared since Burke, and in which he energetically supported the rights of the Peninsular peoples against the military despotism of France. Naturally his interest in such questions overflowed into verse, and thus we have a number

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of political sonnets which have often been compared with the political sonnets of Milton. Those “ composed while the author was engaged in writing a Tract occasioned by the Convention of Cintra ” are very characteristic.

Not 'mid the world's vain objects that enslave
The free-born Soul—that World whose vaunted skill
In selfish interest perverts the will,
Whose factions lead astray the wise and brave—
Not there ; but in dark wood and rocky cave,
And hollow vale which foaming torrents fill
With omnipresent murmur as they rave
Down their steep beds, that never shall be still :
Here, mighty Nature ! in this school sublime
I weigh the hopes and fears of suffering Spain ;
For her consult the auguries of time,
And through the human heart explore my way ;
And look and listen—gathering, whence I may,
Triumph, and thoughts no bondage can restrain.

Alas ! what boots the long laborious quest
Of moral prudence, sought through good and ill ;
Or pains abstruse—to elevate the will,
And lead us on to that transcendent rest
Where every passion shall the sway attest
Of Reason, seated on her sovereign hill ;
What is it but a vain and curious skill,
If sapient Germany must lie deprest,
Beneath the brutal sword ?—Her haughty Schools
Shall blush ; and may not we with sorrow say—
A few strong instincts and a few plain rules,
Among the herdsmen of the Alps, have wrought
More for mankind at this unhappy day
Than all the pride of intellect and thought ?

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The mention of Milton above will excuse the introduction here of another sonnet, also born of political interests, though dating from some years earlier.

Milton ! thou should'st be living at this hour :
England hath need of thee : she is a fen
Of stagnant waters : altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men ;
Oh ! raise us up, return to us again ;
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart :
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea :
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
So didst thou travel on life's common way,
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

XIII

RYDAL MOUNT stands on the sloping side of a rocky hill called Nab Scar. Below are Rydal Lake and the Rothay, flowing down to Windermere ; in front, " a length of level valley, the extended lake, and a terminating ridge of low hills " ; behind and on both sides, " lofty fells which," Wordsworth noticed, brought " the heavenly bodies to touch, as it were, the earth upon the mountain tops," while among the valleys they seemed to shine " as winter lamps at a distance among the leafless trees." These observations led him,

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soon after his settlement at the Mount, to write the following verses :

If thou indeed derive thy light from Heaven,
Then, to the measure of that heaven-born light,
Shine, Poet ! in thy place, and be content :—
The stars pre-eminent in magnitude,
And they that from the zenith dart their beams,
(Visible though they be to half the earth,
Though half a sphere be conscious of their brightness)
Are yet of no diviner origin,
No purer essence, than the one that burns,
Like an untended watch-fire on the ridge
Of some dark mountain ; or than those which seem
Humbly to hang, like twinkling winter lamps,
Among the branches of the leafless trees.
All are the undying offspring of one Sire :
Then, to the measure of the light vouchsafed,
Shine, Poet ! in thy place, and be content.

Wordsworth's appointment, at Lord Lonsdale's instigation, as distributor of stamps for Westmorland at a salary of £400 a year made a welcome addition to his resources at a time when they were being rather sorely taxed by the needs of his fast growing family. He now gave much time to the education of his eldest son, and this led him to a careful re-reading of some of the Latin writers, notably Vergil, a poet whose spirit was in many ways cognate with his own. A new inspiration—that of classic story—thus came into his work, the most important result of which is the fine poem "Laodamia." When the remarkable chasteness of diction in

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this poem is carefully considered, no surprise will be felt at Wordsworth's assertion that it cost him more trouble than "almost anything of equal length" he had ever written.

LAODAMIA

"With sacrifice before the rising morn
Vows have I made by fruitless hope inspired ;
And from the infernal Gods, 'mid shades forlorn
Of night, my slaughtered Lord have I required :
Celestial pity I again implore ;—
Restore him to my sight—great Jove, restore !"

So speaking, and by fervent love endowed
With faith, the Suppliant heavenward lifts her hands ;
While, like the sun emerging from a cloud,
Her countenance brightens—and her eye expands ;
Her bosom heaves and spreads, her stature grows ;
And she expects the issue in repose.

O terror ! what hath she perceived ?—O joy !
What doth she look on ?—whom doth she behold ?
Her Hero slain upon the beach of Troy ?
His vital presence ? his corporeal mould ?
It is—if sense deceive her not—'tis He !
And a God leads him, wingèd Mercury !

Mild Hermes spake—and touched her with his wand
That calms all fear ; "Such grace hath crowned thy
prayer,

Laodamia ! that at Jove's command
Thy Husband walks the paths of upper air :
He comes to tarry with thee three hours' space ;
Accept the gift, behold him face to face !"

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Forth sprang the impassioned Queen her Lord to clasp ;
Again that consummation she essayed ;
But unsubstantial Form eludes her grasp
As often as that eager grasp was made.
The Phantom parts—but parts to re-unite,
And re-assume his place before her sight.

“ Protesiláus, lo ! thy guide is gone !
Confirm, I pray, the vision with thy voice :
This is our palace,—yonder is thy throne ;
Speak, and the floor thou tread'st on will rejoice.
Not to appal me have the gods bestowed
This precious boon ; and blest a sad abode.”

“ Great Jove, Laodamía ! doth not leave
His gifts imperfect :—Spectre though I be,
I am not sent to scare thee or deceive ;
But in reward of thy fidelity.
And something also did my worth obtain ;
For fearless virtue bringeth boundless gain.

“ Thou knowest, the Delphic oracle foretold
That the first Greek who touched the Trojan strand
Should die ; but me the threat could not withhold :
A generous cause a victim did demand ;
And forth I leapt upon the sandy plain ;
A self-devoted chief—by Hector slain.”

“ Supreme of Heroes—bravest, noblest, best !
Thy matchless courage I bewail no more.
Which then, when tens of thousands were deprest
By doubt, propelled thee to the fatal shore ;
Thou found'st—and I forgive thee—here thou art—
A nobler counsellor than my poor heart.

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“ But thou, though capable of sternest deed,
Wert kind as resolute, and good as brave ;
And he, whose power restores thee, hath decreed
Thou should'st elude the malice of the grave :
Redundant are thy locks, thy lips as fair
As when their breath enriched Thessalian air.

“ No Spectre greets me,—no vain Shadow this ;
Come, blooming Hero, place thee by my side !
Give, on this well-known couch, one nuptial kiss
To me, this day, a second time thy bride ! ”
Jove frowned in heaven : the conscious Parcæ threw
Upon those roseate lips a Stygian hue.

“ This visage tells thee that my doom is past :
Nor should the change be mourned, even if the joys
Of sense were able to return as fast
And surely as they vanish. Earth destroys
Those raptures duly—Erebus disdains :
Calm pleasures there abide—majestic pains.

“ Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control
Rebellious passion : for the Gods approve
The depth, and not the tumult, of the soul ;
A fervent, not ungovernable, love.
Thy transports moderate ; and meekly mourn
When I depart, for brief is my sojourn—”

“ Ah, wherefore ?—Did not Hercules by force
Wrest from the guardian Monster of the tomb
Alcestis, a reanimated corse,
Given back to dwell on earth in vernal bloom ?
Medea's spells dispersed the weight of years,
And Æson stood a youth 'mid youthful peers.

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“ The Gods to us are merciful—and they
Yet further may relent : for mightier far
Than strength of nerve and sinew, or the sway
Of magic potent over sun and star,
Is love, though oft to agony distrest,
And though his favourite seat be feeble woman’s
 breast.

“ But if thou goest, I follow—” “ Peace ! ” he said,—
She looked upon him and was calmed and cheered ;
The ghastly colour from his lips had fled ;
In his deportment, shape, and mien, appeared
Elysian beauty, melancholy grace,
Brought from a pensive though a happy place.

He spake of love, such love as Spirits feel
In worlds whose course is equable and pure ;
No fears to beat away—no strife to heal—
The past unsighed for, and the future sure ;
Spake of heroic arts in graver mood
Revived, with finer harmony pursued ;

Of all that is most beauteous—imaged there
In happier beauty ; more pellucid streams,
An ampler ether, a diviner air,
And fields invested with purpureal gleams ;
Climes which the sun, who sheds the brightest day
Earth knows, is all unworthy to survey.

Yet there the Soul shall enter which hath earned
That privilege by virtue.—“ Ill,” said he,
“ The end of man’s existence I discerned,
Who from ignoble games and revelry
Could draw, when we had parted, vain delight,
While tears were thy best pastime, day and night ;
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“ And while my youthful peers before my eyes
(Each hero following his peculiar bent)
Prepared themselves for glorious enterprise
By martial sports,—or, seated in the tent,
Chieftains and kings in council were detained ;
What time the fleet at Aulis lay enchained.

“ The wished-for wind was given :—I then revolved
The oracle, upon the silent sea ;
And, if no worthier led the way, resolved
That, of a thousand vessels, mine should be
The foremost prow in pressing to the strand,—
Mine the first blood that tinged the Trojan sand.

“ Yet bitter, oft-times bitter, was the pang
When of thy loss I thought, belovèd Wife !
On thee too fondly did my memory hang,
And on the joys we shared in mortal life,—
The paths which we had trod—these fountains, flowers,
My new-planned cities, and unfinished towers.

“ But should suspense permit the Foe to cry,
‘ Behold they tremble !—haughty their array,
Yet of their number no one dares to die ? ’
In soul I swept the indignity away :
Old frailties then recurred :—but lofty thought,
In act embodied, my deliverance wrought.

“ And Thou, though strong in love, art all too weak
In reason, in self-government too slow ;
I counsel thee by fortitude to seek
Our blest re-union in the shades below.
The invisible world with thee hath sympathised ;
Be thy affections raised and solemnised.

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“ Learn, by a mortal yearning, to ascend—
Seeking a higher object. Love was given,
Encouraged, sanctioned, chiefly for that end ;
For this the passion to excess was driven—
That self might be annulled : her bondage prove
The fetters of a dream, opposed to love.”—

Aloud she shrieked ! for Hermes reappears !
Round the dear Shade she would have clung—’tis
vain :

The hours are past—too brief had they been years ;
And him no mortal effort can detain :
Swift, toward the realms that know not earthly day,
He through the portal takes his silent way,
And on the palace-floor a lifeless corse She lay.

Thus, all in vain exhorted and reproved,
She perished ; and, as for a wilful crime,
By the just Gods whom no weak pity moved,
Was doomed to wear out her appointed time,
Apart from happy Ghosts, that gather flowers
Of blissful quiet ’mid unfading bowers.

—Yet tears to human suffering are due ;
And mortal hopes defeated and o’erthrown
Are mourned by man, and not by man alone,
As fondly he believes.—Upon the side
Of Hellespont (such faith was entertained)
A knot of spiry trees for ages grew
From out the tomb of him for whom she died ;
And ever, when such stature they had gained
That Ilium’s walls were subject to their view,
The trees’ tall summits withered at the sight ;
A constant interchange of growth and blight !

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This poem was written in 1814. In the autumn of that year, in company with his wife and sister-in-law Sarah Hutchinson, Wordsworth made a second tour in Scotland. Ten years before he and Dorothy had been on the point of visiting the Yarrow, so famous in the history and romance of the Border, but had after all decided to reserve the pleasure for some future occasion. This had been the theme of "Yarrow Unvisited" :

Let beeves and home-bred kine partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow ;
The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow !
We will not see them ; will not go,
To-day, nor yet to-morrow,
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.

Be Yarrow stream unseen, unknown !
It must, or we shall rue it :
We have a vision of our own ;
Ah ! why should we undo it ?
The treasured dreams of times long past,
We'll keep them, winsome Marrow !
For when we're there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow !

This time the deferred pleasure was enjoyed under the guidance of James Hogg, "the Ettrick Shepherd," and "Yarrow Visited" contains a vivid description of the poet's impressions.

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And is this—Yarrow ?—*This* the Stream
Of which my fancy cherished,
So faithfully, a waking dream ?
An image that hath perished !
O that some Minstrel's harp were near,
To utter notes of gladness,
And chase this silence from the air,
That fills my heart with sadness ! . . .

The vapours linger round the Heights,
They melt, and soon must vanish ;
One hour is theirs, nor more is mine—
Sad thought, which I would banish,
But that I know, where'er I go,
Thy genuine image, Yarrow !
Will dwell with me—to heighten joy,
And cheer my mind in sorrow.

This year “ The Excursion ” was published, and the year following, the first collective edition of Wordsworth's poems, with a further essay setting out his theories of poetry. His “ Thanksgiving Ode,” written for the General Thanksgiving of January 1816, was his next important production. This last of any importance of his political poems, like several of the earlier sonnets, will always be noteworthy for its treatment of the character of Napoleon, in whom Wordsworth had seen from the first the incarnation of materialism, and whose downfall he welcomed as the providential vindication of spiritual forces against the “ big battalions ” theory for which the mighty conqueror had stood. In such protest against

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the mere "idolatry of power," Wordsworth was true to all the noblest ideals of his poetic vocation. None the less, as Lord Morley has said, "Waterloo may be taken for the date at which his social grasp began to fail." By this time he had travelled far from the political faith of his young manhood ; he was now a tory among the tories ; and henceforth the march of events in England only served to make him the more narrow and obstinate in his toryism. Hence we find him, in his extreme reaction against the movements which in his youth had shaken the framework of society, zealously supporting existing institutions and even the abuses which presently inspired a fresh energy of reform. He saw in "the feudal power yet surviving in England" a bulwark against the growth of that popular government which he had come to dread. He allied himself with the forces of intolerance and obscurantism. He opposed Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Bill, and wrote a sonnet attacking the Ballot. He was justified indeed in seeing spiritual power at work in Napoleon's overthrow. But it is deplorable that his theory of the divine government of the world should lead him to suggest that the cholera was God's condemnation of the great reforms which he loathed.

These things, however, do not in themselves much concern us here. It is more to the point to remember that, as Lord Morley further says, Wordsworth's "poetic glow" began to fail along with his "social grasp." We are now

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entering upon the long period of his decline. For thirty years more he continued to write with all the old industry and with occasional visitations of the old fire. But he added little of vital importance to the work which he had done. Indeed, we may almost say, with the critic just quoted, that in the following great poem of 1818 we have "our last glimpse of Wordsworth in the full and peculiar power of his genius."

COMPOSED UPON AN EVENING OF EXTRAORDINARY SPLENDOUR AND BEAUTY

Had this effulgence disappeared
With flying haste, I might have sent,
Among the speechless clouds, a look
Of blank astonishment ;
But 'tis endued with power to stay,
And sanctify one closing day,
That frail Mortality may see—
What is ?—ah no, but what *can* be !
Time was when field and watery cove
With modulated echoes rang,
While choirs of fervent Angels sang
Their vespers in the grove ;
Or, crowning, star-like, each some sovereign height,
Warbled, for heaven above and earth below,
Strains suitable to both.—Such holy rite,
Methinks, if audibly repeated now
From hill or valley, could not move
Sublimier transport, purer love,

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Than doth this silent spectacle—the gleam—
The shadow—and the peace supreme !

No sound is uttered,—but a deep
And solemn harmony pervades
The hollow vale from steep to steep,
And penetrates the glades.
Far-distant images draw nigh,
Called forth by wondrous potency
Of beamy radiance, that imbues,
Whate'er it strikes, with gem-like hues !
In vision exquisitely clear,
Herds range along the mountain side ;
And glistening antlers are descried ;
And gilded flocks appear.
Thine is the tranquil hour, purpleal Eve !
But long as god-like wish, or hope divine,
Informs my spirit, ne'er can I believe
That this magnificence is wholly thine !
—From worlds not quickened by the sun
A portion of the gift is won ;
An intermingling of Heaven's pomp is spread
On ground which British shepherds tread !

And, if there be whom broken ties
Afflict, or injuries assail,
Yon hazy ridges to their eyes
Present a glorious scale,
Climbing suffused with sunny air,
To stop—no record hath told where !
And tempting Fancy to ascend,
And with immortal Spirits blend !
—Wings at my shoulders seem to play ;
But, rooted here, I stand and gaze
On those bright steps that heavenward raise

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Their practicable way.

Come forth, ye drooping old men, look abroad,
And see to what fair countries ye are bound !
And if some traveller, weary of his road,
Hath slept since noon-tide on the grassy ground,
Ye Genii ! to his covert speed ;
And wake him with such gentle heed
As may attune his soul to meet the dower
Bestowed on this transcendent hour !

Such hues from their celestial Urn
Were wont to stream before mine eye,
Where'er it wandered in the morn
Of blissful infancy.

This glimpse of glory, why renewed ?

Nay, rather speak with gratitude ;

For, if a vestige of those gleams

Survived, 'twas only in my dreams.

Dread Power ! whom peace and calmness serve

No less than Nature's threatening voice,

If aught unworthy be my choice,

From THEE if I would swerve ;

Oh, let thy grace remind me of the light

Full early lost, and fruitlessly deplored ;

Which, at this moment, on my waking sight

Appears to shine, by miracle restored ;

My soul, though yet confined to earth,

Rejoices in a second birth !

—'Tis past, the visionary splendour fades ;

And night approaches with her shades.¹

In 1820 Wordsworth spent four months abroad with his wife, Dorothy, and some friends,

¹ "Allusions to the Ode entitled 'Intimations of Immortality,'" Wordsworth pointed out, "pervade the last stanza of the foregoing Poem."

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and recorded his impressions in a number of sonnets and brief poems which he published as "Memorials of a Tour on the Continent." That year he also published "The River Duddon : A Series of Sonnets," in several of which there is a welcome return of the old power and felicity. The two examples here given are the 18th and the 34th.

SEATHWAITE CHAPEL

Sacred Religion ! "mother of form and fear,"
Dread arbitress of mutable respect,
New rites ordaining when the old are wrecked,
Or cease to please the fickle worshipper ;
Mother of Love ! (that name best suits thee here)
Mother of Love ! for this deep vale, protect
Truth's holy lamp, pure source of bright effect,
Gifted to purge the vapoury atmosphere
That seeks to stifle it ;—as in those days
When this low Pile a Gospel Teacher knew,
Whose good works formed an endless retinue :
A Pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays ;
Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew ;
And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless
praise !

AFTER-THOUGHT

I thought of Thee, my partner and my guide,
As being past away.—Vain sympathies !
For, backward, Duddon, as I cast my eyes,
I see what was, and is, and will abide ;

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Still glides the Stream, and shall for ever glide ;
The Form remains, the Function never dies ;
While we, the brave, the mighty, and the wise,
We Men, who in our morn of youth defied
The elements, must vanish ;—be it so !
Enough, if something from our hands have power
To live, and act, and serve the future hour ;
And if, as toward the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's transcendent
dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know.

Another and more ambitious series, which appeared in 1822, was that of the " Ecclesiastical Sonnets," to which reference has already been made. The chief influence behind these is to be found in the conversations on church history which, while a guest at Coleorton, Wordsworth had with Beaumont, who was then building a new church on his estate, though popular interest in the Catholic Relief Bill, then under discussion, doubtless acted as a further stimulus. In them Wordsworth undertakes to trace the history of the Church in England from the introduction of Christianity into Britain down to his own times. Their title is well chosen, for they are ecclesiastical poems in the narrower sense of the term, and not, except in a secondary way, religious or devotional. That in these sonnets he should have anticipated at various points the ideas of the Oxford Movement of some years later, especially in his defence of Laud, is certainly a fact upon which passing emphasis may be laid.

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Yet his Anglicanism did not prevent¹ him from sympathizing with the leaders of the Reformation, nor did it destroy his old admiration of Milton, greatly as he regretted "some of his opinions, whether theological or political."¹ I select for transcription the opening sonnet of Part iii, which is remarkable at least for the circumstances of its composition. It was, Wordsworth relates, the result of a dream; the figure seen was that of his daughter; the "whole passed as here represented"; and the poem was conceived and completed "word for word as it now stands" in the course of a walk from Grasmere to Ambleside. It was not often, Wordsworth adds, that his sonnets were thus produced in a finished state by such a single effort. "Most of them," on the contrary, "were frequently retouched in the course of composition, and, not a few, laboriously."

I saw the figure of a lovely Maid
Seated alone beneath a darksome tree,
Whose fondly-overhanging canopy
Set off her brightness with a pleasing shade.
No Spirit was she; *that* my heart betrayed,
For she was one I loved exceedingly;
But while I gazed in tender reverie
(Or was it sleep that with my Fancy played?)
The bright corporeal presence—form and face—
Remaining still distinct grew thin and rare,
Like sunny mist;—at length the golden hair,

¹ Note to "At Vallombrosa," in "Memorials of a Tour in Italy."

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Shape, limbs, and heavenly features, keeping pace
Each with the other in a lingering race
Of dissolution, melted into air.

Happy as he was at home, Wordsworth continued to feel that yearning for travel which, as he confessed, was ingrained in his character. In 1823 he was again abroad, this time with his wife as his only companion. In 1824 he took his wife and daughter to North Wales, visiting his old friend Jones, with whom he had made his first memorable expedition many years before. In 1825 there was much talk in the household of a long residence on the Continent. This came to nothing at the time. But when in 1827 Sir George Beaumont died, leaving to Wordsworth an annuity of £100 to be spent in a yearly tour, the plan which had been dropped was taken up again, though in a less ambitious form, and in 1828 he started with his daughter and Coleridge for Belgium and the Rhine. Then in 1831 came his third visit to Scotland, during which he again and for the last time saw Scott, then hopelessly shattered in health and on the eve of that visit to the Continent from which he was to return only to die. This sad meeting was the theme of the third Yarrow poem.

YARROW REVISITED

The gallant Youth, who may have gained,
Or seeks, a "winsome Marrow,"
Was but an Infant in the lap
When first I looked on Yarrow ;

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Once more, by Newark's Castle-gate
Long left without a warder,
I stood, looked, listened, and with Thee,
Great Minstrel of the Border !

Grave thoughts ruled wide on that sweet day,
Their dignity installing
In gentle bosoms, while sere leaves
Were on the bough, or falling ;
But breezes played, and sunshine gleamed—
The forest to embolden ;
Reddened the fiery hues, and shot
Transparence through the golden.

For busy thoughts the Stream flowed on
In foamy agitation ;
And slept in many a crystal pool
For quiet contemplation :
No public and no private care
The freeborn mind enthralling,
We made a day of happy hours,
Our happy days recalling.

Brisk Youth appeared, the Morn of youth,
With freaks of graceful folly,—
Life's temperate Noon, her sober Eve,
Her Night not melancholy ;
Past, present, future, all appeared
In harmony united,
Like guests that meet, and some from far,
By cordial love invited.

And if, as Yarrow, through the woods
And down the meadow ranging,
Did meet us with unaltered face,
Though we were changed and changing ;

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If, *then*, some natural shadows spread
Our inward prospect over,
The soul's deep valley was not slow
[Its brightness to recover.

Eternal blessings on the Muse,
And her divine employment !
The blameless Muse, who trains her Sons
For hope and calm enjoyment ;
Albeit sickness, lingering yet,
Has o'er their pillow brooded ;
And Care waylays their steps—a Sprite
Not easily eluded.

For thee, O SCOTT ! compelled to change
Green Eildon-hill and Cheviot
For warm Vesuvio's vine-clad slopes ;
And leave thy Tweed and Tiviot
For mild Sorento's breezy waves ;
May classic Fancy, linking
With native Fancy her fresh aid,
Preserve thy heart from sinking !

Oh ! while they minister to thee,
Each vying with the other,
May Health return to mellow Age
With Strength, her venturous brother ;
And Tiber, and each brook and rill
Renowned in song and story,
With unimagined beauty shine,
Nor lose one ray of glory !

For Thou, upon a hundred streams,
By tales of love and sorrow,
Of faithful love, undaunted truth,
Hast shed the power of Yarrow ;

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And streams unknown, hills yet unseen,
Wherever they invite Thee,
At parent Nature's grateful call,
With gladness must requite Thee.

A gracious welcome shall be thine,
Such looks of love and honour
As thy own Yarrow gave to me
When first I gazed upon her ;
Beheld what I had feared to see,
Unwilling to surrender
Dreams treasured up from early days,
The holy and the tender.

And what, for this frail world, were all
That mortals do or suffer,
Did no responsive harp, no pen,
Memorial tribute offer ?
Yea, what were mighty Nature's self ?
Her features, could they win us,
Unhelped by the poetic voice
That hourly speaks within us ?

Nor deem that localised Romance
Plays false with our affections ;
Unsanctifies our tears—made sport
For fanciful dejections :
Ah, no ! the visions of the past
Sustain the heart in feeling
Life as she is—our changeful Life,
With friends and kindred dealing.

Bear witness, Ye, whose thoughts that day
In Yarrow's groves were centred ;
Who through the silent portal arch
Of mouldering Newark entered ;

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And clomb the winding stair that once
Too timidly was mounted
By the "last Minstrel," (not the last !)
Ere he his Tale recounted.

Flow on for ever, Yarrow Stream !
Fulfil thy pensive duty,
Well pleased that future Bards should chant
For simple hearts thy beauty ;
To dream-light dear while yet unseen,
Dear to the common sunshine,
And dearer still, as now I feel,
To memory's shadowy moonshine !

Before leaving Abbotsford Wordsworth expressed the hope, which he could scarcely have felt, that Scott's health would be greatly benefited by his tour. The incident and Scott's reply were recorded by Wordsworth six years later in his "Musings near Aquapendente" :

Years followed years, and when, upon the eve
Of his last going from Tweed-side, thought turned,
Or by another's sympathy was led,
To this bright land, Hope was for him no friend,
Knowledge no help ; Imagination shaped
No promise. Still, in more than ear-deep seats,
Survives for me, and cannot but survive
The tone of voice which wedded borrowed words
To sadness not their own, when, with faint smile
Forced by intent to take from speech its edge,
He said, "When I am there, although 'tis fair,
'Twill be another Yarrow."

Meanwhile sorrows were coming fast upon him. In the winter of 1828-29 his beloved sister was prostrated by the first serious illness

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of her life ; her mind as well as her physical strength soon began to fail ; and before long she was a confirmed invalid. Coleridge, the "friend of more than thirty years," died in 1834. In 1836 Sarah Hutchinson, long a member of the Rydal Mount household, passed away, leaving a gap which no one else could fill. The circle of his literary acquaintances was also being rapidly thinned ; and when in 1835 came news of the death of the Ettrick Shepherd, he poured forth his sadness over his many losses in some verses of touching tenderness and simplicity. These verses show that he was beginning to experience that sense of loneliness which comes to those who, as age creeps on, find themselves the survivors of their generation, and, like Tennyson's *Bedivere*, "among new men, strange faces, other minds." The references, as will be seen, are to Hogg himself, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb (on whom Wordsworth had already written a memorial poem), Crabbe, and Felicia Hemans.

EXTEMPORE EFFUSION UPON THE DEATH OF JAMES HOGG

When first, descending from the moorlands,
I saw the Stream of Yarrow glide
Along a bare and open valley,
The Ettrick Shepherd was my guide.

When last along its banks I wandered,
Through groves that had begun to shed
Their golden leaves upon the pathways,
My steps the Border-minstrel led.

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The mighty Minstrel breathes no longer,
'Mid mouldering ruins low he lies ;
And death upon the braes of Yarrow,
Has closed the Shepherd-poet's eyes :

Nor has the rolling year twice measured,
From sign to sign, its stedfast course,
Since every mortal power of Coleridge
Was frozen at its marvellous source ;

The rapt One, of the godlike forehead,
The heaven-eyed creature sleeps in earth :
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
Has vanished from his lonely hearth.

Like clouds that rake the mountain-summits,
Or waves that own no curbing hand,
How fast has brother followed brother
From sunshine to the sunless land !

Yet I, whose lids from infant slumber
Were earlier raised, remain to hear
A timid voice, that asks in whispers,
“ Who next will drop and disappear ? ”

Our haughty life is crowned with darkness,
Like London with its own black wreath,
On which with thee, O Crabbe ! forth-looking,
I gazed from Hampstead's breezy heath.

As if but yesterday departed,
Thou too art gone before ; but why,
O'er ripe fruit, seasonably gathered,
Should frail survivors heave a sigh ?

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Mourn rather for that holy Spirit,
Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep ;
For Her who, ere her summer faded,
Has sunk into a breathless sleep.

No more of old romantic sorrows,
For slaughtered Youth or love-lorn Maid !
With sharper grief is Yarrow smitten,
And Ettrick mourns with her their Poet dead.

In 1837 Wordsworth made his last foreign trip, to Italy. A visit to Italy had been a dream of Dorothy's life, but she was now unable to travel, and his friend, Crabb Robinson, was the poet's only companion. To that friend, whose "buoyant spirit" cheered him on his way, he dedicated his "Memorials of a Tour in Italy." But, as Robinson records in his "Diary," he wrote but little, while in what he did write "meditation predominates over observation." This tendency of the mind to turn upon itself, even in the midst of novelties, is evidence of failing interest in outward things ; and Wordsworth himself felt its import. "It is too late," he often said on the journey ; and once : "I have matter for volumes, had I but youth to work it up." The ageing poet was at length becoming aware of waning powers. One poem among these "Memorials" possesses in his own phrase a "rather melancholy" interest. It is entitled "The Cuckoo at Laverna." He had always loved the cuckoo's voice, and years before, at Dove Cottage, he had written some delightful verses to his favourite bird.

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TO THE CUCKOO

O blithe New-comer ! I have heard,
I hear thee and rejoice.
O Cuckoo ! shall I call thee Bird,
Or but a wandering Voice ?

While I am lying on the grass
Thy twofold shout I hear,
From hill to hill it seems to pass,
At once far off, and near.

Though babbling only to the Vale,
Of sunshine and of flowers,
Thou bringest unto me a tale
Of visionary hours.

Thrice welcome, darling of the Spring !
Even yet thou art to me
No bird, but an invisible thing,
A voice, a mystery ;

The same whom in my school-boy days
I listened to ; that Cry
Which made me look a thousand ways
In bush, and tree, and sky.

To seek thee did I often rove
Through woods and on the green ;
And thou wert still a hope, a love ;
Still longed for, never seen.

And I can listen to thee yet ;
Can lie upon the plain
And listen, till I do beget
That golden time again.

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O blessèd Bird ! the earth we pace
Again appears to be
An unsubstantial, faery place ;
That is fit home for Thee !

Now at Laverna he has to record his inability, through growing deafness, to hear the cuckoo's beloved cry " till Mr. Robinson had twice or thrice " directed his attention to it.

List—'twas the Cuckoo.—O with what delight
Heard I that voice ! and catch it now, though faint,
Far off and faint, and melting into air,
Yet not to be mistaken. Hark again !
Those louder cries give notice that the Bird,
Although invisible as Echo's self,
Is wheeling hitherward. Thanks, happy Creature,
For this unthought-of greeting !

XIV

ONE satisfaction the years brought to Wordsworth as some compensation for the sorrows of advancing life and this sense of declining strength. He was now at last coming into his own.

More than any other great English poet he had to suffer from protracted public neglect, and, a part cause of this, from the contempt and ridicule of the official leaders of taste, notably Jeffrey. That scolding critic, who for a long time wielded an influence hardly justified by the quality of his work, had year after year pursued the poet with the bitterest and most

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reckless hostility. He denounced the volumes of 1807 as "coarse, inelegant, and infantine"; described the themes of the poems as "low, silly, and uninteresting"; and sneered at the verses "To the Small Celandine" as "namby-pamby." The Immortality Ode he dismissed as "illegible and unintelligible." Of "Alice Fell" he wrote: "If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult to the public taste, we are afraid that it cannot be insulted." Speaking of "Resolution and Independence," he defied "the bitterest enemy of Mr. Wordsworth to produce anything at all parallel from any collection of English poetry, or even from the specimens of his friend Mr. Southey" (an admirable example, by the way, of the economical practice known as killing two birds with one stone). He declared that "The Excursion" would "never do," and pronounced "The White Doe of Rylstone" "the very worst poem we ever saw imprinted in a quarto volume" and the product of a mind in a state of "low and maudlin imbecility." These are samples of the "arch-critic's" judgment, and though in places, as we must candidly admit, he erred rather by virulence of language than by perversion of opinion, the indiscriminating character of his criticism is obvious. Wordsworth himself took these attacks with extraordinary equanimity, and begged Lady Beaumont not to be disturbed by them. "Never forget," he wrote to her, in a spirit of calm self-confidence, "what, I believe, was observed to you by

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Coleridge, that every great and original writer, in proportion as he is great and original, must himself create the taste by which he is to be realized." Yet, though the poet was thus able to adopt the attitude of quiet indifference, Jeffrey's incessant onslaughts had certainly much to do with the tardiness of his rise to fame.

The current, however, was now turning. Public sympathy began to come round to him, and even Jeffrey was ultimately forced to make a grudging apology for his "asperity" and "*vivacités* of expression." A new generation was arising who saw greatness and meaning in his work to which their fathers had been blind. Unmistakable signs of growing reputation and influence followed within the next few years. In 1838 he received an honorary degree from the University of Durham. In 1839, Oxford, always prone to wait till her favours can be safely bestowed, granted him a similar mark of approval. In 1840 the Queen Dowager visited him at Rydal Mount. In 1842 Sir Robert Peel placed his name on the Civil List for a pension of £300 a year. In 1843, on the death of Southey, he was made poet-laureate, and actually appeared at Court, wearing a suit which he borrowed from Rogers and which, though a rather tight fit, did well enough for the occasion. He was now indeed universally regarded as the patriarch of English letters.

Three years later he lost his last surviving brother, Christopher, the Master of Trinity

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College, Cambridge, and in 1847 his only daughter Dora, who since 1841 had been the wife of Edward Quillinan. He had borne many sorrows with a firm courage supported by religious faith. But he was now old, and this unexpected blow left him heartbroken. He did not, however, live long to mourn his beloved child. On March 12, 1850, while sitting on a stone seat to watch the setting sun, he caught a chill, and had to take to his bed. Two days afterwards he was attacked by severe pains in his side ; on the 20th pleurisy set in ; on the 23rd he sank peacefully into his final rest. His mind was filled with thoughts of his daughter even to the very end. " Is that Dora ? " he had asked, when some one had quietly drawn the curtains of his bed.

There was some talk of burial in Westminster Abbey. Far more appropriately his body lies in Grasmere Churchyard, among the hills and the people he had loved so well.

The old rude church, with bare, bald tower, is here ;
Beneath its shadow high-born Rotha flows ;
Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near,
And with cool murmur lulling his repose—

Rotha, remembering well who slumbers near.
His hills, his lakes, his streams are with him yet.
Surely the heart that read her own heart clear
Nature forgets not soon : 'tis we forget.¹

¹ William Watson : " Wordsworth's Grave."

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XV

WORDSWORTH'S personality was not altogether engaging. In his own family circle, indeed, and in his daily intercourse with his rustic neighbours he was kind and sympathetic, and, as we are told by Sir Henry Taylor and others, even in general society, where he was very much less at home, he could at times unbend and take his share of the talk about him with a certain dignified grace. But we feel that on the whole he lacked geniality and flexibility, that he was a little stiff, a little austere, often even a little pompous and not a little dull. He wanted, too, breadth of outlook, and while undoubtedly his exclusive attention to the few great subjects of his choice gave him the power which comes of concentration in his own special field, such advantage was purchased by the sacrifice of many interests which add richness and variety to human life. The absence of any sense of humour from his intellectual composition must also be recognized as another serious defect. But the feature of his character which perhaps most unfavourably impressed those who met him, at all events in his later years, was his entire engrossment with himself. By temperament he was self-centred and self-contained, and the peculiar conditions of his life—his isolation, his lonely and introspective habits, his intense preoccupation with his own work, the worship paid to him by a

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small coterie of ardent admirers, the neglect of the general public, and the abuse of the critics—all helped in different ways to deepen his self-absorption into an egotism which was not the less to be regretted because it was bound up with some of the most estimable qualities of his nature. One unfortunate aspect of this egotism was his inability to appreciate the work of his contemporaries in literature, even when, as in the case of Scott and Southey, for example, they happened to be personal friends.

These, however, are but the shortcomings—the negligible shortcomings—of an essentially strong and noble character ; and it is upon the strength and the nobility that I prefer here to dwell. A north-countryman to his backbone, if he had something of the hardness he had also the sterling virtues of the stock from which he sprang. His simplicity, his indifference to worldly honour and emolument, his steady devotion to his art and mission, are alike admirable. Admirable, too, are his fortitude, his self-control, the stability of his mind, and his fine power of linking the ideal with the commonplaces of the everyday lot. Like his own skylark, he was

Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home.

The “ plain living and high thinking ” which he inculcated were his own rule and inspiration. The purity, the lofty temper, the utter trans-

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parency of soul which we find in his poetry we find also in his life.

Let me add a pen-portrait of the poet in his old age from the hand of that great master of portraiture, Carlyle, who met him at one of Sir Henry Taylor's literary breakfast parties.

He talked well in his way, with veracity, easy brevity, and force—as a wise tradesman would of his tools and workshop, and as no unwise one could. His voice was good, frank, and sonorous, though practically clear, distinct and forcible, rather than melodious ; the tone of him business-like, sedately confident ; no discourtesy, yet no anxiety about being courteous : a fine wholesome rusticity, fresh as his mountain breezes, sat well on this stalwart veteran, and on all he said and did. You would have said he was a usually taciturn man, glad to unlock himself to audience sympathetic and intelligent when such offered itself. His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful, meditation ; the look of it not bland or benevolent, so much as close, impregnable, and hard ; a man *multa tacere loquive paratus*, in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradictions as he strode along ! The eyes were not very brilliant, but they had a quiet clearness ; there was enough of brow, and well shaped ; rather too much of cheek (" horse face " I have heard satirists say), face of squarish shape and decidedly longish, as I think the head itself was (*its " length " going horizontal*). He was large-boned, lean, but still firm-knit, tall, and strong-looking when he stood ; a right good old steel-grey figure, with a fine rustic simplicity and dignity about him and a veracious *strength* looking through him, which might have

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suited one of those old steel-grey Markgrafs . . . whom Henry the Fowler set up to ward the marches and do battle with the intrusive heathen, in a stalwart and judicious manner.

One personal peculiarity may be mentioned which has a direct interest for the student of his work. Rugged of constitution and abstemious of habit, Wordsworth was able to bear with impunity any amount of exposure and physical fatigue ; but the intensity of his excitement during composition often prostrated him completely. " I have never a pen in my hand for five minutes," he once wrote to Beaumont, " before my whole frame becomes a bundle of uneasiness ; a perspiration starts out all over me, and my chest is oppressed in a manner which I cannot describe."

In a note to one of his poems, in which he rather quaintly apologizes to his wife and sister for having so often been late for dinner and further records the irritation in one of his heels caused by wearing too tight a shoe, he tells us that " poetic excitement, when accompanied by protracted labour in composition, has throughout my life brought me more or less bodily derangement." Dorothy's journals are full of such entries as these : " William worked at the Leech Gatherer almost incessantly from morning till teatime . . . he wearied himself to death." " William did not sleep till three o'clock." " William very nervous." " William had a bad night, and

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was working at his poem." "We read the first part of the poem, and were delighted with it, but William afterwards got to some ugly place, and went to bed tired out." "Poor William wore himself out and me with labour."

Wordsworth's poetry may impress us as we read by its prevailing serenity. But if, in his own phrase, there is little in it of "the tumult of the soul," it was none the less the product of persistent application and great emotional strain.

It has been the aim of the foregoing pages to bring out not only the personal interest of that poetry, but also some of its enduring qualities. Only a few words of summary will now be necessary.

Wordsworth, as we have seen, owes his distinctive position in our literature in part to his wonderful power as an interpreter of nature, especially on the spiritual side. More than any other poet he brought to men "barricadoed evermore within the walls of cities" a revelation of the beauty and of the divine meaning of "this goodly Universe." To make them partakers of his own joy in the "living Presence of the Earth" was one important aspect of his conscious mission. Deeply deploring the blindness and deafness of the average man to the glories of the world about him, he believed that even a superstitious veneration of the forces of nature was better than apathy born of absorption in material things.

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The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :
Little we see in Nature that is ours ;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !
The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon ;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers ;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune ;
It moves us not.—Great God ! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn ;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea ;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

It was Wordsworth's constant purpose to overcome the apathy against which he makes this passionate protest ; to open the eyes of his readers to the loveliness of nature and their souls to her divine message.

Great as an interpreter of nature, Wordsworth, however, was no less great as an interpreter of human life, and his position in this respect is equally distinctive. No one can read the poems which I have quoted without feeling this. Here again we are in touch with what I have called his conscious mission. "Every great poet is a teacher," he wrote to Beaumont. "I wish to be considered as a teacher, or as nothing." In these uncompromising words he announces his directly didactic purpose. That this purpose is often far too obtrusive in his work is of course admitted. That it is to be held responsible for the thousands

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of lines of dull and prosy moralizings which he gives us, for instance, in "The Excursion," is equally evident. But if too often, in his capacity of mere homilist, he is satisfied with the bare inculcation of moral truth, in his really inspired moods, in his really vital verse, moral truth is transmuted by him into the purest poetry ; and then, as in the "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," he is great at once as a poet and as a teacher. There is nothing, indeed, pretentious or particularly recondite about his philosophy. It deals with a few central thoughts, and these thoughts can be easily formulated and understood. But its simplicity is part of its virtue and strength. Wordsworth, in fact, is deep because he is simple. Brushing aside the merely artificial and conventional ideas about life and its values in which we are accustomed to rest, but which confuse our vision and hamper our spiritual freedom, he throws his emphasis continually upon the things which are elemental and essential—upon those primary affections and impregnable instincts which lie at the very root of life. He addresses himself to the power which we have latent within us to lift ourselves by resolute effort above the entanglements of circumstance and to live at peace within ourselves. Above all, let us remember, he is so bracing and helpful because he is the poet of happiness, and because, by proclaiming that the secret of true happiness is to be sought, not in external conditions, but in the soul, he shows us where we may purchase it "without

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money and without price." Virtue, for him, is the one road to such happiness, and happiness is its final reward, and though, in Sir Henry Taylor's words, he recognizes that "genial virtue" must often fall back upon "severe virtue for support," moral struggle and the strenuousness of moral purpose must, he teaches, ultimately issue in the abounding joy which comes to a nature attuned to the demands of eternal law. Such is the theme of one of his noblest poems.

ODE TO DUTY

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God !
O Duty ! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove ;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe ;
From vain temptations dost set free ;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity !

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them ; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth :
Glad Hearts ! without reproach or blot
Who do thy work, and know it not :
Oh ! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power ! around them
cast.

Serene will be our days and bright,
And happy will our nature be,

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When love is an unerring light,
And joy its own security.
And they a blissful course may hold
Even now, who, not unwisely bold,
Live in the spirit of this creed ;
Yet seek thy firm support, according to their need.

I, loving freedom, and untried ;
No sport of every random gust,
Yet being to myself a guide,
Too blindly have reposed my trust :
And oft, when in my heart was heard
Thy timely mandate, I deferred
The task, in smoother walks to stray ;
But thee I now would serve more strictly, if I may.

Through no disturbance of my soul,
Or strong compunction in me wrought,
I supplicate for thy control ;
But in the quietness of thought :
Me this unchartered freedom tires ;
I feel the weight of chance-desires :
My hopes no more must change their name,
I long for a repose that ever is the same.

Stern Lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face :
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong ;
And the most ancient heavens, through Thee, are
fresh and strong.

To humbler functions, awful Power !
I call thee : I myself commend

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Unto thy guidance from this hour ;
Oh, let my weakness have an end !
Give unto me, made lowly wise,
The spirit of self-sacrifice ;
The confidence of reason give ;
And in the light of truth thy Bondman let me live !

If, as Emerson finely says, "the great poets are judged by the frame of mind they induce," the greatness of the writer of these superb verses is surely beyond question.

Wordsworth's inequalities must be apparent to every one who considers his production as a whole, and must be frankly recognized. He wrote much when the poetic inspiration was upon him, and we have seen something of the splendid results. But he wrote much also when the poetic inspiration was not upon him, and hence the immense amount of absolutely perishable matter in his too voluminous work. More than most poets, therefore, he gains by judicious selection. But when the perishable matter has been rejected, what remains, though relatively small in bulk in proportion to the totality of his output, will hold its place secure among the world's possessions for ever. Sixty years have now passed since his death, and time has already justified his firm belief that his poems would "co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society," and would, "in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier."

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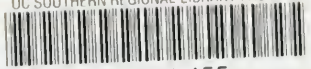
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